

Halo Fanfic

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Summary: A young twelve year old lives a normal life in this world, and time...But things go awry when she travels to another... And when it comes to her. Destiny and fate throws her around like a ragdoll.

1. The Light Of Destiny

The light of destiny

A blinding flash was all I could see. All I could remember was a normal afternoon at my house. Wait. I couldn't see? I opened my eyes. I was in a large room, the walls and floors covered with metal plates. Neon lights lit the roof above my head. It looked like a holding bay of some sort. There were strange vehicles around me. Then I felt the cold touch of metal on my forehead.

I had only a second to take this all in. Then the gun. I moved my eyes up slowly, examining it. It looked like some sort of large pistol. Familiar. Wait. It's a gun from the computer game I play, HALO. I wanted to see whoever my assailant was. Whoever it was, they were extremely tall. Then I tripped upon its - no, definitely his - face. The gaze fixing me was an unbelievable icy-blue. Cold. Calm. His mouth was a flat line, betraying no emotion. The white arm holding the gun had corded muscle all along its length. I returned to his face. He had very dark brown hair, verging on black, and a large scar travelled over his left eye and stopped somewhere under his chin. Then my panic kicked in. I did what my body wanted to do. I fainted.

I woke up sometime later, in a drab, grey room. There were no windows, so I didn't know where I was. I was lying on an uninviting grey metal slab. No wonder my back ached. I got up and looked for a way out. I was extremely curious. That man holding the gun was strange. I saw some kind of blue light covering the door. It looked solid. Strange. Is light meant to be solid? I didn't think so. I charged the light and found to my surprise,

The light _was_ solid.

"What theâ€¦|Okâ€¦|.hard lightâ€¦|Hmm.."

I rubbed my bottom and face at the same time. The barrier deactivated and a man walked in, wearing some kind of ceramic armour. I knew this because its sheen made it look somewhat like a teacup's. I examined the man carefully. He had brown eyes and freckled white skin. Compared to the other man, the first one, this guy almost looked if he could be an ice-cream man. He was a lot shorter, too. I noticed an eagle on the right side of the breastplate. In small letters underneath it said "UNSC". It hit me like a lightning bolt and my brain automatically changed it to United Nations Space Command. The main military force in HALO.

The man spoke.

"The commander would like to see you."

He eyed me strangely. I didn't blame him, I _did_ appear outta nowhere. He turned and marched out. I found myself surrounded on all sides by people dressed likewise.

"So I heard you appeared in thin air?"

The figure who spoke had his back to me. I was in a small, slightly stuffy room with a window. Now I knew where I was. In space. On a spaceship. The only furniture occupying the room was a table and chair and a rather bored looking woman in white armour. (She was so still I counted her as furniture).

I reminded myself of who and what she was. She was the commander of the Spartan IVs. In Halo, Spartans are humans, but with kinda superpowers and tactics and stuff. Oh. And cool guns. _And_ armour. There were four different Spartan programs, each with specific augmentations and other stuff I couldn't remember. The IVs were the latest, I remembered. Anyway, this is _the_ Sarah Palmer. I couldn't believe she was standing right next to me. I felt tiny. No wonder why. She's almost taller than my dad.

"Who are you? Where are you from?" The figure turned around. His face wasn't unkind, though stern. He obviously fully realised he was interrogating a child. Brown hair, brown eyes. He would be quite boring if not for his character which oozed command and superiority. Then a jolt hit me. It was Thomas Lasky, commander of the UNSC Infinity, a huge spaceship. I couldn't believe it. I mentally kicked myself. Dur. Commander plus space equals spaceship commander.

"Hello?"

I started. I didn't realize my silence. Thomas was looking at me intently. Sarah seemed indifferent.

"Errmâ€¦|..umâ€¦|.my names Emilyâ€¦|" I stammered.

"And can you tell me exactly how you got here?" He questioned.

"Wellâ€¦I uhâ€¦.i was in my room, readingâ€¦then I couldn't see then I ended up here."

"Where is your room?"

"In Australiaâ€¦.."

Lasky started.

"You came from Australia?"

"Yeahâ€¦..this might sound weird butâ€¦.the year 2014 as well?"

I winced. I didn't know if he would take me seriously. He seemed to think for a moment. Sarah turned to look at me strangely.

"And how would I know you're not lying?"

"These."

I pulled my book and iPod out of my pocket. He look strangely at the book, I realised most of their stuff is digitalised in Halo.

"You do realise the year is 2558?"

I had to lie. I didn't want them to know I already knew. This date was sometime after Halo 4, the newest Halo game.

"Errrrmmâ€¦.no."

I suddenly felt really tired. I yawned widely. Sarah gained a slightly amused expression. Lasky blinked.

BEEP BEEP! BEEP!-

"MUUUM! Five more minutes!" I yelled.

Then I remembered. I sat straight upright. Lasky had given me a room to sleep in, Sarah unceremoniously kicking the resident Spartan out. It was a simple thing. There was a desk, a chair, a bed and a bathroom. I looked for the sound of the alarm. A blue light emanated from the wall next to me and I turned to look. I almost fell out of my bed. A thirty centimetre tall woman stood on a raised pedestal. And she was BLUE. My mouth fell open. It was Cortana, the infamous A.I. from Halo. I recalled all I remembered on the subjectâ€¦.They live for about 7-8 years before their core processing started to break down. Cortana was a smart A.I. capable of thinking for herself and performing billions of calculations in less than a second. However, I remembered Cortana was different. She had been made from a cloned human brain and actually could have emotions, though her core processing attempted to deny it.

"Hello, Emily. The ships A.I., Roland, is a little busy at the moment, so I shall help you."

"Iâ€¦errrâ€¦.I'm hungryâ€¦" I muttered grumpily.

I wanted to scream that if I didn't eat soon I would likely eat my own pillow. Cortana didn't seem fazed, she grinned happily.

"The monitors in this room detected your blood sugars are quite low. However, I suggest getting clean first, as Spartan Sarah Palmer will be taking you on a tour of the ship. Lasky's order, of course."

"Hang on. If I had a showerâ€¦and you can monitorâ€¦"

Cortana beat me to it.

"The UNSC values their soldier's privacy, I believe."

Ugh. She was annoying. So smug.

I walked into the bathroom, closing the door.

"I hope you weren't lying!" I yelled.

I received an amused snort.

I followed the massive Spartan around, jogging slightly to keep up.

"Down that hall there, that's the armoury. That's where we store Spartan armour and guns."

She sounded rather bored. I supposed Lasky told her to show me some stuff. The Infinity is huge. She only showed me a small section, near my room. And already I was having trouble comprehending how big the Infinity is. Palmer walked out on a raised catwalk, extending above a huge room. It must have been at least a kilometre wide, and a hundred meters high.

"That's the aircraft bay." Palmer said indifferently.

It was filled to the brim with Pelicans, coming, going, being repaired. Pelicans were the UNSC's troop carrier. They sported a machine gun turret on the chin, as well as a laser cannon. They were at least as long as a house.

"Are you coming? Or is your brain still in 2014?" asked a cocky voice.

I jerked awake. I'd been so distractedâ€¦ Sarah was standing five meters away, tapping her foot. I ran to catch up. She walked through a long tunnel, and another large room awaited us. There were numerous Spartans, training, marching, testing their armour.

"This is what you would call a Spartan club. We come here to do all our main activities, when there is no war."

But I was interested in something far more awesome.

A huge, metal giant was walking toward us on the walkway. It was huge. Two meters, at least. It strode past, the grace and beauty far outstripping the clunky giant appearance. I looked up into the helmets visor. It was orange, with hexagonal lines. The rest of the armour was olive green, covered with chinks, chips and scratches.

I knew exactly what I was looking at.

The Master Chief.

I sat in my bed, thinking over the day. I still couldn't believe I was in the Halo universe, dimension, worldâ€¦..whatever. Plus the fact I saw him. The Master Chief. The guy who, in the Halo world, had blown up numerous constructsâ€¦..(particularly Halos) saved Earth, and killed some evil ancient alien dude. He is a Spartan II. They had a reputation for beingâ€¦..different. I remember staring up into the orange visor, seeing my own startled face reflected in it. I sighed. This was going out of control.

BEEP! BEEE-

"CORTANA TURN THAT OFF!"

"Yes mi 'lady, whatever you say mi 'lady" Came the mocking reply.

I rubbed my sleepy eyes and got ready.

"You have been set a test today."

"Test?" My mouth turned dry.

"Yes, just so Thomas can see how well you've remembered Palmer's tour. You will be finding your own way to the lecture room."

"Great." I said sarcastically.

1 hour later

"Yay. This is just awesome"

I had gotten myself lost. Dammit!â€¦..Should've taken a left turnâ€¦.. I was under the catwalk that Palmer had shown me, amongst the Spartans. God, the amount of times I had almost been trampled was ridiculous. I had noticed a lot of the Spartan IVs had taken curious notice and watched me scramble around, some even laughing. But one exception didn't react at all.

Master Chief Petty Officer John-117 watched the child dart about, tripping over various items and sometimes a stray foot. I did find it mildly amusingâ€¦..she looked somewhat like a duck. What? Where had that come from? I nearly slapped myself. I probably should help her, although I was told she had to do it herself. The child grew too near for my liking, so I shrunk back into the shadows. I knew I was hard to see, anyway. I don't like the attention that comes to me if people know who I am. I want to be left alone, mostly. I watched intently as the girl came to a halt on the opposite wall. I can read people easily, but the young girl wasn't even trying to mask her emotions. My enhanced eyesight could clearly see she was completely stressed out, with a twinge of fear. I felt somethingâ€¦..strange. Was that pity? I frowned. I genuinely wanted to help this child. I don't like the way Lasky and Palmer areâ€¦..studying her. How could they not see the intelligent glimmer in her eyes, I could see clearly that she didn't need to be tested. Sometimes I seriously doubted my superiors. I obeyed them, of course, but sometimes I thought they made the wrong decisions. I was shocked at myself. I wanted to disobey a clear order to help a child that had appeared mysteriously in front of me out of nowhere. I made up my mind. I shifted so that the light would only

reveal me to her. She picked me out instantly, focusing that gaze on me. _

Good, I thought.

She obviously recognised me. But she did something strange and completely unexpected. She stalked straight over and looked up at me with anger.

A small amount of surprise filled the giant man's eyes, but quickly evaporated back into nothingness. I knew I wanted to feel strong, because I knew I was scared out of my wits. I knew he probably wasn't allowed to help me, probably told not to, but hell, was I gonna try. But I cannot believe myself. I am glaring anger and defiance in the face of the man who had saved the galaxy. Multiple times. Not to mention he has killed thousands of aliens, has unbreakable bones, binocular vision, extreme hearing and can most likely lift a car and throw it. Then I realised the creepy effect of that brilliant blue gaze. It sent shivers down my spine. It was calculating. Cold. Extremely intelligent. I knew that if he wanted to, he could have killed half of everyone in this room before anyone noticed. I could not, didn't want to hold that gaze for any longer. I was no match.

I looked away.

This child interested me like nothing else. I was not prepared for the girl to throw everything from the past days into that one glare. It was incredibly stupid on her part. Now I knew I had to help her. Thomas was delusional. This child was perfectly fine; she didn't need to be examined. The thought of that disturbed me slightly. By now the girl had looked away. I was, to say. Quite impressed.

"So you gonna help me?" I growled angrily.

I was .

I watched John carefully. I was kinda scared. He towered over me, had muscles you wouldn't believe and just the glare from those _eyes_ was enough to send anyone running. I could tell he was thinking. Sometimes the undercurrents of thought appeared, as a slight tensing of his jaw or a blink. I sighed and began to walk away. Man I was disappointed. I, for some reason, wanted to impress Lasky. Strange. I wasn't even planning to _stay_.

A deep voice spoke. "I will help. But you cannot tell."

There it was. Short, sharp, to the point. But it was a "yes" nonetheless. I mentally punched the air with my fist. I trailed behind him, looking for landmarks but the twists and turns of corridors confused me and I gave up. The attention that everyone gave John was weird. It was a cross between reverence, fear and awe. I noticed that he stiffened up considerably when someone would talk about him when he passed. I understood, I hated attention too. Just then, I saw the sign with "lecture room" on it. I stepped forward and turned to say thanks, but no-one was there. I was amazed that someone of that size could disappear so completely.

"So, Emily. How much do you know of maths?" inquired Lasky.

How is this relevant? This was getting annoying.

"Errmâ€¦A lot I s'pose though I don't enjoy it.

"Times tables?" frowned Thomas.

I yawned.

"I'm in year seven"

"Equations? Algebra? Fractions?" continued Lasky.

"Been there. Done that. Seen it."

I was getting sick of this. All week it had been nag, nag, nag. And none of it was relevant!

Thomas sighed. It was laden with responsibility, doubt, and sadness. Something was troubling him.

"I'm getting someone to show you around the armoury properly. Sarah wasâ€¦reluctant to agree to the tour, so I wasn't surprised you weren't shown everything."

Sarah smirked at me.

"Who?"

Damnit. Now I knew why. I had rounded the corner, almost smacking into a chest of solid muscle. Heck, I wasn't even sure if he wanted to do this for Lasky.

John was to show me the armoury.

Emily looked betrayed. There was a small scowl on her face. I found it moderately amusing the serious posture she attempted to adopt. My size helped a bit, I pondered. Her clothes, deliberately shrunk, were still ridiculously big on her. She muttered under her breath, which I could hear clearly as if she had actually wanted me to hear.

"_Oooohhâ€¦Palmers in for itâ€¦"_

She then attempted to look rough and tough. I laughed inwardly. She was extremely stubborn. She could make a good Spartan.

This man was infuriating. Anything I didn't understand was explained in short, sharp sentences. He wouldn't even answer my questions! It was like talking to a brick wall. I couldn't blame him, the training he went through and all that. The horrors he had seen probably didn't help either. But why, WHY did he have to be so tough to break.

"Would you _please,_ PLEASE let me ask you a question?"

Silence for a moment.

"You just did" he replied in a perfectly flat tone.

Smartass. I knew he was laughing at me, I just _knew _it.

"Discount that then." I muttered.

He seemed to agree, lowering his head a bit and looking at me out of the corner of his eye.

"So how do the Spartans take their armour off?"

"The machines."

The "machines" were almost like dentist chairs, but facing vertically. About ten arms extended about.

"So they just step up and their armour gets taken off?"

"Yes." came the crisp reply.

"Does their butt armour come off? Cause I'd sure like to kick Sarah's."

Was that a smile? I swear, the corner of his lips twitched slightly.

"Yes, although I would refrain from doing soâ€¦..yours may be included in the kicking."

I had to laugh. The completely serious tone was so funny to hear in such a silly sentence.

I almost broke out into a smile. Almost. My years of trainingâ€¦.and other things swallowed up the moment. This girl-this child- had the demeanour and characteristics of a feisty teenager. I couldn't help cracking some sort of joke. I didn't want, for some reason, to intimidate this child. I felt strangeâ€¦.was I getting fond of this child? I didn't know, I never really knew someone properly before they died.

I could clearly see the amusement in the gaze of the normally serious Spartan. I smiled quite wolfishly. Somehow, I had gotten a battle-scarred veteran super-soldier to smile.

So I've been here for a week and a half. I'm starting to miss my world. And time. Thomas Lasky says that I'm only still on the Infinity because she's on a mission. So in short I was stuck on a spaceship. For some reason, Lasky had given me stuff to study. I didn't know why, it was some sort of weapons list and ammo types or something.

So I was walking back to my room, attempting to squint at the weird list, while dodging people and small vehicles. I was being led by John, so all I had to do was keep his massive form in the corner of my eye.

Emily was amazingly good at multitasking. The girl was looking down with extreme concentration and annoyance at a piece of paper. I already knew what was on the paper.

I like this child, I thought.

_She could make a good Spartan, or at least a marine. Strange. This child was making me feelâ€¦.was that happiness? I don't understand. I

usually don't feel anything. Emily wasâ€¦helping me? I am confused. How was this twelve year oldâ€¦helping me? I stopped walking abruptly. I felt a small force as Emily continued and cannoned into me._

All of a sudden, I walked straight smack into John-117's back. It was like smacking into wet concrete. I could feel the corded muscle under my face as I fell backwards.

"Hey! Watch it!" I said angrily.

I observed him as he turned around. He lookedâ€¦strange. There was the usually stoic face, but his eyes were muddled. I couldn't even begin to piece the emotions back together.

"Errmâ€¦I uhâ€¦" I stuttered.

This guy creeps me out.

I didn't care if he was a super-soldier or whatever.

"Help me up would you?"

He didn't move. I'd had enough.

"OH _COME ON!_ Thomas has been _ANNOYING_ me all week, now you come waltzing in, knocking me over without a care, being woken _EVERY MORNING _by Cortana, and I'm _FED UP!"_

Then I noticed the silence. Everyone in ten metres was staring at me. Then they laughed. I wished an airlock would open and suck me out. John was the only one not laughing. I felt my cheeks crimson alarmingly. Then I couldn't hold it in any longer.

I cried.

I could clearly see the emotions swirling about on Emily's face. It went from indescribable rage to embarrassment and then circled to sadness. She began to cry quietly. Again, I felt the strange need to help her. But I don't know how.

You haven't the need to calm down a child, a voice in my head said.

Leave her.

_I was bewildered. I don't know what to do. I ignored the nagging voice in my head. Then I decided. I didn't care that everyone in the vast corridor was watching, didn't care that they would think I'm even stranger. _

I picked Emily up and hugged her. I didn't know if I was even doing it properly. For some reason, Emily was helping me becomeâ€¦.. more human? I couldn't believe myself. I just openly agreed that I was different. I had to repay Emily.

I would protect her, I thought firmly.

I almost fainted when he hugged me. I was so shocked. I couldn't even see the jeering faces, my face was squished up against his chest.

Good lord, he gave the best bear hug. I was surprised his soldier-like mind had the ability to understand someone else's emotions. The laughter fell silent. Well, John tried. So I rewarded him, I stopped crying. I wanted to hug him like I did with my dad, but I wasn't sure how he would react. Then the embarrassment kicked in. Here I was, getting cuddled by a seven foot tall super soldier who had killed thousands of aliens, blown up numerous things, (almost himself a lot) and saved Earth from the Covenant (aliens). I pulled away, looking up into those blue eyes. For once they seemed satisfied.

Thomas Lasky sighed. It had been a boring, tough week. That child had been instrumental in making his life a misery. And to put it all down, she seemed to do it on purpose. His thoughts crowded with doubt again. He felt so guilty. He had to, he told himself. He couldn't send her back to her own time, couldn't risk her revealing the Infinity's secrets. Palmer had made it perfectly clear.

Thomas was forced to make Emily a Spartan.

One specific Spartan was not happy. You couldn't see it, but he was fuming with anger. His perfectly calm face hid the swirl of intelligent thought. His blue eyes were kept perfectly blank.

I don't want her to become a Spartan. She shouldn't ever see the horrors that I have. Lasky knew she had a life outside of this world, this time. And I wanted her to return to it. This was wrong on a lot of levels, I knew.

_I had to get Emily out of here, or die trying. _

I found her standing in front of a large window looking out into space. The swirls of gas cloud and dust floated past. I strode forward silently and said her name.

"Emily."

"Argh!"

I must have at least jumped a foot into the air. I swivelled around.

"Hey! Don't sneak up on me."

John looked confused.

"Make. Some. Noise. Next. Time."

He cocked his head to the side slightly. Whoa. It actually looked kinda cute.

"Yeah, what?" I asked. He only usually talked to me when he had to.

"There is something Lasky isn't telling you."

I sighed. Why can't people just tell me?

"He is going to keep you here. Make you a Spartan."

Okâ€¦..So that was why he wanted me to learn about the Infinity. It would be cool to wear that armourâ€¦..But that meant I would have toâ€¦.._kill_ things.

"But how would I go back to my world?"

"Possibly if I take you back to where you appeared."

"So then why haven't I done that already?"

"Lasky has made it clear he doesn't want anyone in there."

I gritted my teeth. Why couldn't he make an actual sentence?

"So are we gonna try?"

For once he smiled stiffly.

"Yes. And I should enjoy it."

I ran as fast as I could, with Emily on my back, her arms tight around my neck. She was screaming. I smirked. My enhanced muscles meant I was running at 60km/h. I couldn't run at that speed for much longer, I had already run the two kilometres from the viewing window to the holding bays. I was untouchable. No Spartan IV could match my speed, because as a Spartan II my augmentations wereâ€¦..Much more. Dangerously so. Most of the candidates had died. I was one of the lucky ones.

I dug in my heels and stopped. I wanted to take out the guards silently, and swiftly. They obviously had heard the alarm and were looking around intently.

I turned and whispered to Emily.

"_Stay here. Be quiet._"

I snuck around to the guards, slipping behind them. They never knew what hit them. One had his neck broken and the other had a combat knife buried in his neck before either of them could blink. I felt a little twinge. I did not enjoy killing humans. I glanced at the titanium steel door.

I smiled inwardly.

"So how you gonna get the doors open?" I asked, eyeing the dead guards.

"I am not planning to _open_ it."

He fastened his hands on the edges of the door.

"Wait. Are you gonna?"

A loud creaking sound came from the door. Wow. John was making a thirty centimetre thick door _bend._ His eyes were closed in concentration. The doors were fighting a losing battle. They crumpled inwards. I looked at the interior behind the doors. I felt a flush of excitement. I recognised the room.

"This is it!" I said excitedly.

"I'm afraid it's not." said a familiar voice. Lasky.

John whipped around, drawing his pistol he always seemed to have at his hip. The only thing I saw was a blur and the gun was levelled at Lasky's head. Lasky swallowed nervously, sweat beading on his forehead.

"Emily. Go." John said calmly.

He seemed not to care that there were now several guns pointing at him. I didn't want to leave. But it sounded like an order. I ran into the holding bay, flinging myself at the strange light that was starting to appear. John turned and threw something at me. I caught it just as the light enveloped all I could see.

I was in a room. Wait. My room. Then I remembered John.

I opened my hand.

They were his dogtags.

I woke up sometime later in a bland white room. I was confused for a second. Then it all came back. I sighed. Did she make it? I didn't know. As I gave her my dogtags, Spartan IV Sarah Palmer had shot me in the side. A pang on my right side, near my ribs confirmed that. The painkillers would wear off soon. I reviewed why I wanted to help her. I didn't want her to become what I and others had. A mindless killing machine. If I had died trying to save her from that, I wouldn't have cared. Emily had invoked a feeling in me. Some feelings I had never had. I attempted to stand up, the powerful painkillers not incapacitating me. My feet hit the floor and I pushed myself up. However, the bullet wound in my side didn't agree. A jolt of pain ran up my spine and across my chest and my legs collapsed. My mind could deal with the pain, but my body couldn't. I heard Lasky sniffing beside me.

"I...I'm so sorry, John. I didn't mean to"

"To shoot me? To hold Emily hostage?" I answered flatly, no pain evident in my voice.

"You don't understand. I had to do this. I could not risk her telling everyone the Infinity's secrets!"

I groaned a little. The pain was starting to break down my mind's well-built barriers. I was not in the best state to play mind games.

"I'm sorry. I wish I could've done it another way"

"Did she make it?" I said hopefully.

"Yes." Sighed Lasky.

"Good."

I passed out from pain and exhaustion. But I knew she was safe.

I was happy I was back. I owed it all to John. I was surprised to find that he was a good friend, if not a little too serious. I giggled when I remembered how he cocks his head to the side when he doesn't understand. It makes him look like grown Rottweiler acting like a puppy. I sighed. I actually was missing John. I decided right then and there something that I had been thinking about.

"I will never tell."

2. The Light (Sequel)

THE LIGHT

I stalked silently down the long, grey metal corridor. My mind was crowded with thoughts.

Would she come back? When? Where?

Whispers intruded on my thoughts.

"_What's up with him?" a marine whispered to another._

"_Dunno. Some say he's going bonkers." he shrugged._

"_Shut up you idiots!" chastised their commanding officer._

Everyone glanced nervously at the tall, long legged figure. It had stopped.

I was indifferent to some teases or whisperings, I was used to it. But not this full on barrage of them. I was a freak. I was crazy. I was weird. I hated it. I was not good with words, so I couldn't fight back without actually hurting them, which was against UNSC regulations. I sighed. Emily could solve this so easily, give the marines a tongue lashing they'd never forget. The thought of her lightened my mood slightly. I could never be truly happy, no matter how hard I tried to break past those mental barriers that training and experience had set up. The thought should disturb me, but of course it does not. Sometimes I actually hated my surgical enhancements. Especially the hearing. I could hear anything within a ten meter radius. One example, I thought, was that as I was walking to the dormitories, I could clearly hear two young marines slobbering over each other inside their room. I shuddered inwardly. I had never loved anything. I didn't understand why people wasted so much of their time kissing each other when the whole purpose of a "date" and a "wife" was to produce offspring. It wasted time. I-

_I cut off my thought. What was happening to me? I can't compensate for these rogue thoughts. They were completely irrelevant, yet sometimes they keep annoying me. My lifestyle did not allow these...presumes of love. I halted outside my door, room 117.

—

_What a fabulous coincidence, I thought. My own number, randomly selected on a database of the ship. I opened the door carefully, I didn't want to have to go and beg another engineer to fix it for me. The aluminium was too flimsy and completely stupid. What if The Infinity was attacked and she was boarded? An alien, a Covenant,

could simply touch the door and it would come down. I sat on the bed, grabbing a pencil from the desk and chewing on the end. I had seen Emily doing it, it tasted disgusting, the cured wood, but it helped me think. My leg was long enough to just kick the door shut. It closed, but as I pulled my boot away, I saw I had left a dent mark. I sighed. Everything was too fragile. It annoyed me greatly having to restrain myself every time I touched something, or picked it up or even came near anything. I suddenly felt the urge to do what Emily had done one morning after Cortana had woken her up. (We had replayed the footage for my and Lasky's amusement.) I turned and face planted into the pillow. I smiled stiffly. It felt oddly satisfying._

"_Idolising children, are we?" said a woman's voice._

I shot upwards, my muscles responding quickly and smoothly. To any normal human it would have seemed I was lying down, and then sitting upright with a blur. I sprung into a ready stance. I relaxed when I realised it was just Cortana. Her hologram had a new hairdo, something she did often. I rolled my eyes. Sometimes she was helpful or just plain annoying. I secretly hoped she hadn't come to be the latter.

"_I see you have done something to your hair. Again." I stated flatly._

"_I see you noticed. Aren't you mister funny today? I was also wondering if you would like yourâ€¦injury to be looked over by one of the medics. You haven't let anyone near it since the accident."_

I narrowed my eyes. Sarah Palmer had shot me. I didn't hold anything personal; I got straight back into beingâ€¦friends somewhat with Lasky and her afterwards. It had been a month, but the wound was healing nicely and I didn't see any reason to check on it.

"_No. I am fine. I do not like unnecessary fussing. I am not a child." I said firmly._

"_I will notify them, quoting your words. I wasâ€¦Wait."_

_She stopped abruptly. Her hologram looked about. I shot up standing, glaring around the room. _

"_No..It's okay. I'm detecting a slipspace anomaly."_

I noticed a growing light in the corner of my room. Ohâ€¦Not "it" again. As I watched it drifted closer. I stared at it.

"_Is it dangerous?"_

"_No. It's very stable, like a portal. It won't collapse."_

I was curious. It bobbed up and down, like it was beckoning.

"_I'm going to let it take me."_

"_What?!"_

"_Tell Lasky and Palmer where I have gone. Goodbye, Cortana."_

I ran forward, throwing myself at the strange light. It felt like I was still moving, but I couldn't see. A tingling sensation ran over my skin. The light hurt my delicate enhanced eyes, so I shut them.

I yawned widely. I was reading Rangers Apprentice, but it was now getting kind of boring. It was a normal Thursday. I was going to place called Wirraglen, (home schooling get together for kids and their parents) in about two hours. It was only eight AM anyway. I climbed down from my bed, the warmth had softened me up, so when I launched down my bed's steps I was freezing cold. I ignored it and proceeded to rummage through my many boxes. My hand groped around inside a pink one and found it. I pulled out two shiny objects things on a chain. The memories flooded back. The Infinity. Spartans. John. Halo. I put away the dog tags, sitting down to think. My butt never hit the floor. A white light flooded the corner of my room, and I dropped my book. Standing in front of me was John-117, his icy-blue eyes focusing slowly on my own.

Holy crap! I thought. A million things screamed through my head. One wanted to hug John, one wanted to punch him for scaring me, and one told me to hide him. I obeyed that one. He _could not_ be seen. My mother would go psycho and call the police or secret agents or something.

"What, THE _HELL_ JOHN?! Never mind, reunion later! You can't be seen! You'll get caught and detained and other horrible stuff."

His eyes glittered with understanding. They searched about, obviously looking for somewhere to hide. They settled on the wardrobe. I grabbed his arm and yanked it frantically. I was shocked by how _dense_ it was. I likened it to squeezing a rock.

"COME _ON! _In! In!" I whispered, opening the wardrobe door. He tried to fit, but his shoulders were too wide. He tried backwards. By this time I was so nervous I just tried to squish him in. I threw all my weight at his chest and he slipped backwards and landed sitting down, his legs folded awkwardly in front of him, his arms crushed to his sides. Gravity then intervened and a jacket fell on John's head. I had to. I just HAD TO.

I laughed.

The jacket slid off his short, spiky black hair to reveal glaring eyes.

I laughed harder.

His mouth flattened and "â€¦..WAIT! WHAT? Was that a _blush_ I spied? My mind turned to ruthless, cruel teasing but snapped back to the present when John finally spoke.

"Are you willing to tell me where I am? Or are your insides exploding with laughter?" he said completely seriously, in trademark John voice. One of his eyebrows rose slightly.

"Heh. Sure. You're in my world, 2014, Australia, Queensland."

The eyebrow proceeded to rise even further.

"What? Emily, who are you talking to?" said a voice from the end of the hallway.

I chewed my nail nervously.

"Errâ€|No-one mum, just thinking."

I glanced back at the curious man in my closet. If she caught meâ€|

John cocked his head to the side.

"Yeah, that was my-"

"I'm listening." John interrupted.

I shut my trap and observed quietly. His eyes were unfocused and their pupils seemed to expand and contract like a cat's.

"She is coming. Close the door."

I did as he said, shutting it quietly. I sat quickly onto my chair and pretended to read. True to John's warning, she walked in twenty seconds later.

"Emily, pick up your jumper and hang it up, and get ready, we are going soon."

"Yes mum."

She walked out, probably to make her breakfast. I picked up my jumper and opened the wardrobe door. I reached over John to grab a coat hanger.

"So how did you get here anyway?" I asked while I was putting the jacket on the coat hanger.

"The same way you came to me." responded John sharply.

"Ah, I see, the "light" speed express." I joked.

John's eyebrow rose once more, His eyes searching my face. He was observing me, and I hated it. I reached over him again, putting the coat hanger back on the metal bar that ran along the roof of my wardrobe. I stepped back, and looked _extremely _closely at his face, attempting to copy his quiet, observant behaviour. His face was covered in small scars, but one slashed straight down his left eye. Whatever had caused it, John was lucky to still have that eye. His eyebrows were quite thin and angled so that he always looks like he was frowning. He was also very white, probably from being in his armour for so long. I suddenly realised I had fallen into a trick. I blushed. I had been staring for too long. His eyes gained a small amount of amusement.

_I had led her right into my trap. I smirked inwardly. I had tricked her into a stalemate. Then I realised why she had blushed so strongly and turned away. I had heard that people stared at each other when they "loved" each other. Understanding flowed in my brain. I had shoved Emily into a completely new and weird situation. It was the

same for me too. For the most part I felt strangely happy, actually saying more in a few minutes than I do in two hours._

"_You should probably get ready. You were going somewhere?" I changed the subject quite deliberately, signalling all was forgiven._

"_Yeah, just to a community get together for home schoolers. A kinda social thing."_

"Social thingy? I do not understand. What is a home schooler?"

"Urrmâ€|. Well a social "thingy" sorry for the weird grammar- but I'm an Aussie, is that a lot of people come together and talk and to have fun, and a home schooler is someone who is educated at home, by their mum or dad. It's really fun!"

"I see." he said sarcastically.

Now it was my turn to raise an eyebrow.

"I should go. I'll explain the details when I'm done."

I closed the door on those prying, piercing eyes.

Thirty minutes later

>"So I'll be gone for about two to three hours. You can do whatever you want, my brothers have all moved out and my dad is at work. I'm taking my mother with me, so you'll be all by yourself. There's food in the pantry so make a sandwich or something."<p>

John was silent. He got up slowly, stretching his long legs. Poor guy. I felt sorry for him.

"Ok. Gotta run, bye,"

"Goodbye, Emily."

I ran down the hallway, jumped down the steps at the end, and ran through the kitchen and into the garage, grabbing my bag as I went.

_I stalked about, my hands behind my back as I patrolled the house. I didn't know what a "sandwich" was so I didn't "make" one. My long strides covered the length of the house quickly. To my explorations- down from Emily's room was a hallway, with two rooms branching off to the right, and a toilet and bathroom off to the left. At the end was a large expanse, with a few comfy looking chairs and a small black box. I guessed it was a "TV". Straight off to the left was a medium sized, very messy room with a whiteboard and markers. On it were some numbers which looked like fractions and algebra. I guessed this must be where Emily does her "home schooling". I had a look at the worksheets scatted on the round table in the middle of the room. The writing was in pencil and quite sloppy. I could tell she had got them right though, just at first glance. I didn't mind the sloppy penmanship as long as it functioned and she got her answers right. I had to resist the effort to clean up the room. The hallway continued on, branching once again, to the left, which was her parents' bedroom, and to the right, where there were even more comfy lounges

and a huge TV. As the hallway ended it veered to the left and there was a comparatively small black box and what looked like an old computer tower. (It was old to me, anyway.) I had a good look around in Emily's room as well. There were a lot of books and a shelf full of plastic aeroplanes, helicopters, cars, and trucks called "LEGO". (The labels told me so) I also guessed with some accuracy that Emily was a huge tomboy, as there were many aircraft models littering her bed's desk. There were also many books on them, which I flicked through, feeling slight amusement at the old World War Two planes and their propellers._

I took a deep breath as I walked past the doors again. The air here was so clean, for once it wasn't artificial, smelt of fumes or was toxic. My stomach growled. I sighed. Sometimes being so big was not always an advantage. My super reflexes and strength gave me a high metabolism, so if I needed to eat, it was often and in large quantities. I could ignore hunger though. I reviewed a "sandwich". It was obviously food. I decided I would just wait for Emily.

At Wirraglen

"Hey Em!"

"Hi Chloe and Oliver! How's it shakin?" I grinned at my slang.

"Yeah, all good mate." replied Chloe.

"Got any new computer game epic fails?" asked Oliver.

"Ja! Course."

Of course I didn't tell them that I had a _computer _game character in my house.

"Yay! To the Gazebo!"

Oliver charged down to the small building. It was where everyone could choose to have their lunch or discuss stuff. I had other things on my mind, so I just kept walking to the Wirraglen building, a small, squat brick house with a kitchen and not much else. I halted and attempted to copy John's stalking. I felt in command and important doing it.

"What are you doing?"

I turned around. Oliver was staring at me with a weird look on his face.

"What do you mean?"

"You are parading about and scowling. If that's not weird I don't know what is."

"Oh. I was just copying someone I know."

"Well who do you know who walks like that? You look like a commander or something."

"I uhâ€¦I can't tell you."

Oliver looked sad.

Maybe I should? A wave of doubt smashed into me. He would think I was joking, and then ring the hospital to have my head examined. Then it hit me. Oliver was coming over to my house on Friday anyway and today was Thursday. I should tell him now.

"Ummâ€¦..Okayâ€¦..But you can't tell anyone."

I told him everything. The weird light, the gun, Thomas Lasky, Sarah Palmer, Halo, and that right now John-117 was in my house. In short, everything.

He blinked. Once. Twice. Three times. I winced. Would he take me seriously?

"Do you believe me?"

"Ummâ€¦..I don't think you would lie about something this serious."

"You are coming over to my house this Friday so you can see for yourself I'm telling you the truth. I'm not joking."

"Emily? Try telling that to Chloe."

I turned. She was standing right behind me.

"Are you serious Emily? You went to the Halo world, met the Master Chief and escaped from life as a Spartan?" she said incredulously.

"Yeah, but don't tell anyone! I can't let John get captured."

"Why?"

"Because they will study him or something?! I don't know! Don't tell anyone! Please?"

"Ok, but only because I think you're telling porkers."

One hour later

I heard the car coming from Emily's room. It was about two hundred meters down the road. I was in no rush as I calmly packed away Emily's books. They had provided me with my only entertainment while she was gone. By the time the garage door opened I had squeezed myself back into the wardrobe, sitting down inside. I took out the active camouflage ball, just in case someone besides Emily opened the door. The ball was designed by aliens, to provide invisibility. The bearer wasn't totally invisible, however. Someone who knew what they were looking for could see me easily. Emily didn't know I had it. I felt a little bad lying about it, but I was used to it. The garage door opened and the car's engine turned off. I heard small, light footsteps, so I put away the camo ball. The wardrobe door opened.

"_Hey, John. I gotta have a shower, I'm really dirty. Be back

soon."_

I cocked my head to the side. Dirty was an understatement. Filthy would describe Emily better.

"_Hey. You know you look strange when you do that."_

I was confused for a short while. I already thought I was strange. I decided to play this game for a little longer. I tilted my head further to the side.

"_Yeah. That."_

"_In what way?" I asked curiously._

"_Umâ€¦.It's hard to say this, but you look like a puppy begging for food. Cute."_

My lips twitched with barely contained amusement. No one had ever announced I was "cute" before. If this child wanted to say something, she would. She would not take shortcuts. Ever since she had appeared in front of me, there was something in her that I liked.

"Emily! Why aren't you having your shower yet?"

John pursed his lips.

"Yeah, I AM I'm just getting my CLOTHES mum!"

I grabbed them and closed the wardrobe door.

"Emily." The deep voice halted me before I ran to the bathroom.

"Yeah?"

"I am sorry. But I need to eat something." John sounded slightly embarrassed.

Strange. Why would you feel embarrassed if you were hungry? I groaned.

"I'll deal with it after my shower."

Ten minutes later

I peered through the crack in the door. A voice whispered from the hallway.

"_I errmmâ€¦.I forgot my clothes in my rush. So could you, you know, not look?"_

I mentally face palmed. How could she forget anything more vitally important than clothes? However I obeyed and closed my eyes.

"_Done."_

There was a fair amount of rustling and some muttered words which I obviously shouldn't have heard.

"_M'kay. I'm done."_

_The door opened. Emily looked down at me, impressively dressed. She was wearing a striped shirt with deep red pants. She seemed to examine my fashion sense. I was only wearing a standard UNSC shirt, long sleeved and grey. I had black pants, boots and belt. Emily tutted. _

"_Darling, that look is just not working for you, nuh uh."_

I glared. I was hungry and she was forgetting. I was not interested in clothes. She seemed to catch my eyes.

"_Oh. Ok. Food. I'll try to make a sandwich for myself, and then take it up to you. She closed the door and marched off importantly. I listened for ten minutes. My left leg was starting to fall asleep. I stretched it vertically upwards. I heard quick footsteps and the door opened. In came a hand, and arm, and a plate with two pieces of bread "sandwiched" together. I took the plate. How could thisâ€¦..simple thing, be a sandwich?_

"_Don't look at it like it's an alien with a plasma rifle aimed at you. It's yummy! It has my honey on it. Look I have to go. I won't be back for a while."_

She closed the door. I sniffed the sandwich. It smelled sugary and it was very sticky. I took an experimental bite. My eyes widened. This was heaven on Earth, it was delicious. I wolfed it down. I stretched out to wait for Emily. There was no sunlight streaming in through the door when I saw her again.

"_Okay. Its seven pm John. My parents are going to bed soon and you can come out then."_

She examined my hair for a little while, staring closely at it. She seemed to be choking.

"_What?" I said seriously._

She laughed. I was confused. How was my hair funny? Sometimes I did not know what was funny with Emily. She seemed to think everything was. I reached up and felt it. Oh. There was a large clump of it stuck upwards.

"_Here. Lemme get that."_

She reached over. Before I knew it, my hand was instinctively moving to stop hers. I grabbed her wrist. She froze. I didn't know what she meant by "Get that." I let her wrist go. I didn't want to scare her.

I stayed stock still while he had my wrist in his hand. I didn't blame him, his training probably took over. I looked into his eyes. There was some apprehension in them. He obviously was wondering what I was going to do. I ignored that fact and continued my hand's journey to his hair. He did nothing this time, just watched me with that same expression he had when he had hugged me on the Infinity. His body stiffened as my fingers came into contact with his hair, attempting to calm down the outrageous spiked up bits. He eventually

relaxed and his eyes closed, the corners of his mouth twitching up slightly.

I didn't know what she was doing, but I didn't care, it felt amazing. I had never been touched in that way ever. My head had never been massaged before. I was content to let her sit there and do that for ever.

I giggled. I reckoned John was on the brink of purring. The expression on his face was one of utter bliss. I fixed up the crazy bits on his black hair and pulled away. His eyes snapped open and he seemed like he was trying to suppress a sigh. I grinned. He tilted his head in the strange way, so I copied him. He folded his arms and pursed his lips so I did the same. This time the side of his mouth slid _properly_ upwards. He had smiled. I pulled a stupid face and threw a bag at him. His hand was already there to catch it before it had even _reached_ him. He then promptly opened it and shoved it over my head.

"Mppffft!" I pulled it off.

I couldn't believe it. The Master Chief was _playfighting_ with me, out of all things.

"Oi!" I cried indignantly.

"Oh yeah. I also forgot to tell you, my friend Oliver is coming over tomorrow, but don't worry cause he already knows enough about you to not gawk and go psycho."

John's eyes narrowed sharply.

"He alreadyâ€|.knows?"

I slapped a palm on my forehead. I forgot. I already knew about him as well, even before I met him.

"Ok. You see, in my world there is a computer game called Halo and you are the main character. And me and Ethan have played it so we umâ€|..Already know you saved the universe and stuff."

I rummaged around in one of my boxes and pulled out a photo of the Master Chief in his armour that I got off the internet and handed it to John. He glared at it, his eyes narrowing further.

"You lied. You said to Lasky that you didn't even know where you were."

His gaze raked over the inside of the wardrobe and reached me.

"I couldn't tellâ€|.it would only make things harderâ€|"

"So I'm just a computer game character am I? For your entertainment?"

"No! You're notâ€|.I meanâ€|.yesâ€|NO! You are NOT! You are not a machine. Others in your world might think you are but I know you aren't."

He was silent, but he continued to glare. I pressed my forehead into

the floor and held back tears. I didn't want him to hate me. I wanted him to be my friend. I liked him. I sobbed quietly into the carpet. The lights went out. Mum and Dad had gone to bed. All of a sudden, I was weightless, lifted by strong arms. They pulled me into John's chest. I cried into it. I cried because of other things, the stress of hiding him, the stress of keeping the massive secret. After a while I ran out of reasons to cry and just rested my head on John's chest. He didn't say anything, but I knew all was forgiven. I listened to the quiet rhythm of his heart and lungs for a while. John was my _best _friend. Not even Oliver could top this. The regular expanding and contracting of his chest sent me off into dreamland.

_Emily was asleep, but I was not. I had stayed up all night thinking. Emily was almost like an extension of me, she opposed my nature so squarely, yet she complemented me well. She had wrapped her warm, clammy arms around my neck some time ago. Her head was now resting on my shoulder. The only revolting thing was that she had drooled for a little while, one droplet snaking down my neck and down my shirt somewhere. I shivered. I had faced aliens, ancient evil, and yet I was terrified by a droplet of spit. I felt strange today. My emotions had completely defeated my training and run rampant. Somehow this child was _developing _me. I was also in a small state of shock after I learnt that I was a _computer _game character, of all things. It was time for Emily to wake up. She needed to prepare for Oliver. I also needed some time alone. I didn't like being in suchâ€¦close company with someone for too long._

"Emily." called a faint voice. It sounded oddly familiar.

I shifted.

"Five more minutes mum." I mumbled.

I felt a dull, but sharp pain on my arm. I opened my eyes, focusing on a face. It was scarred and very serious. I wondered who it was. The pain intensified. I shook myself apart from the clutches of sleep, glaring at the icy-blue eyes that were looking down at me. My brain's cogs started to turn. HOW DARE HE? John was pinching me!

"OW! Hey!"

John had no comment, but he pulled his fingers away from my skin. I scrambled upright, throwing open the wardrobe door, and flinging myself out. I turned to look at John. He was serious again.

"Emily, how are you going toâ€¦_show_ me to Oliver?"

"I don't know, you're the genius, combat trained professional. You think of the plans."

"I am not used to dealing with such situations."

"Well, what do you have that can help us?"

"I did bring this."

John pulled a sphere out of his pocket. It was a purplish-grey.

"Oooo! Is that what I think it is? Active camouflage?"

He nodded. He squeezed the sphere and his form blurred, then disappeared, save for a slight shimmering of where he was.

"Now you can actually walk around."

I stepped aside. It was creepy; I could feel a slight breeze as he strode past me.

"Okay. That's cool. But back to the situation, I better go get ready. I can't restrict you now, so go where ever you want."

Two hours later

"Hi Oliver!"

"Hi Ems!"

He ran forward and hugged me. I played with him for a little while, trying to distract him from charging straight into my room and flinging the wardrobe door open.

"I think it's time now."

Oliver nodded. I ran to my bedroom with him in tow and shut the door.

"So where is this amazing guy then?"

I tapped my foot, and John appeared. He was across the room, as far away as he could get from Oliver. I remembered that he didn't really like you until he knew he could trust you. He was standing straight, with his hands in fists by his side, his face set into an emotionless mask. His steely gaze was trained directly on Oliver. Even I had trouble even glancing over his face. Oliver's jaw dropped open, and he took a step back.

"That's his name?"

"Yup. The first person I met in his world, although I didn't know it then."

Oliver stepped forward, reaching out toward John. He flinched backwards.

"Don't do that. He doesn't like it."

I reached past and poked John to prove he was real.

"That was active camo he just had on, wasn't it?"

"Yep. Pretty cool huh?"

"So what you gonna do with him? You can't _keep_ him."

"Yeah, but now that I know he has camo, he can walk around without getting spotted."

"But you can still see him, just not very well."

John was watching the exchange quietly. His gaze flicked to Emily, then to Oliver and back again.

"He's actually not all that ba-"

John interrupted.

"Why are you talking about me like I am not even here?" he said.

"He talks?"

"Dur."

I glanced at John. He was becoming somewhat annoyed. Well, it looked like it anyway. You couldn't really tell with him. Oliver clicked his fingers.

"That voice. It's him, alright."

"I know. I told you. He is real."

"I almost thou-"

John interrupted again,

"Your mothers are coming."

And he disappeared. I pretended I was messing with my RC helicopters and Oliver pretended to annoy me. (Actually I didn't know if he was actually pretending.) The door opened and Oliver's mother strode in, his little sister Daisy tagging along behind.

"Oliver, no shutting out your sister."

"Errmâ€¦. It's my fault Rose. She can come in now."

Emily took the blame. I was proud of her. What? Rewind! What made me think that I should be supervising her? Did I consider her almostâ€¦ my responsibility? I asked myself why that would be. It was because I had never taken the handlebars on my life. Everything I did was either ordered or necessary. My thoughts felt soâ€¦ alien in my own head. Then it hit me what that strange, choking feeling that was in my chest was. For the first time in years.

I was scared.

Three hours later

"Bye Oliver."

"CYA Emily. Keep me posted."

"Okay. Sure, will do."

The car drove down the driveway and down the road. I turned and went inside.

"Are you happy now? I invited your friend over." my mother asked

me.

"Yeah, but now I feel really tired."

"Go and have a sleep then."

"Okay."

I marched into my room, and closed the door. John reappeared in front of me.

"I don't like the way Oliver stared at me."

"You're John-117, the legendary hero. Course he's gonna stare."

His already thunderous frown deepened. He was silent. I could almost see the inner turmoil breaking out. I shrugged inwardly. I would give him a big hug to fix everything. I attempted to pin his arms to his sides when I proceeded with my plan, but I failed and they extracted themselves from my grip. I hugged him anyway, even though I didn't even come up to his chest. He stiffened automatically. These things did not come easily to him. He eventually relaxed, though, becoming somewhat squishy and huggable. Okay, for some reason I like a 35-45 year old badass supersoldier. It was weird. But apparently to many people I was already weird, so I didn't really care. John let out a silent sigh.

"Thank you."

"For what?"

"You are helping me to be normal." he said with difficulty.

"It's okay, I s'pose."

I pulled away, remembering something. I rummaged around in one of my boxes and pulled out John's dogtags, and I held them out to him.

"Here. I always wanted to give them back."

He took them and put the chain over his head.

"Thank you again."

"How you gonna get back to your world? And why did you even come here in the first place? Cause you know that light isn't going to take you to safe places all the time."

John frowned and chewed his lip.

"I do not know."

I sniffed. John kinda needed a shower. He'd been in my hot, stuffy wardrobe for the equivalent of two days. He glanced at me.

"I can't shower when you aren't. It would attract attention." he explained.

"Yeah well, you're a boy and I'm a girl, so no."

"I won't look?"

"Nope. Not a chance."

"Then put up with my smell."

I folded my arms, lifting up my head, attempting to look haughty.

"Americans."

I did my best impression of John's American burr.

"I do not sound that that."

"_I do not sound like that." _I mimicked.

"Children." he growled.

I stuck out my tongue. I picked up my book, threw myself down onto my chair and read. John crouched and seemed to begin a strange examination of my carpet.

"Your floor is dirty."

"Mhm."

"You should clean it."

"Nah."

He looked at me out of the corner of his eye. I sniffed again.

"Can I at least spray perfume on you?"

"I do not want to smellâ€¦|._pretty_." he said with disdain.

"It would suit you." I giggled.

He glared at me, so I stuck my tongue out again. He lifted his head and began to copy my haughty look. He obviously found it interesting. I flung my book at him, but he caught it expertly and slid his finger inside to save my page.

"I wonder what we have to do to get you back to your world?"

"The gateway only seems to open when it wants to."

"Then let's _make _it." I growled menacingly.

John shook his head.

"Ask it?"

"No."

"Wish it?"

"_No._"

"Aha! How about we get you to reveal yourself?"

"_What?_"

"No, not like that, as in show people that you are real!"

He seemed to think for a moment.

"It's plausible."

"But its Friday! The next Wirraglen day is on Tuesday! I'll have to keep you hidden and feed you until then."

He looked at me.

"Okay! Okay!"

Four days later

_I woke up and paced around Emily's room. I needed to think. Only Oliver would _really_ know who I was._

"_Hey! John. You ready?_"

"_Yes. But you are not."_

She had only just woken up and almost fell down her bed's steps. I had to catch her.

"_Can you stop acting like a drill sergeant?_"

"_I am not. Would you like me to demonstrate?_"

I was totally serious. I would be screaming at her if I was one.

"_Ermma€|No thanks."_

She had eventually let me have a shower, but insisted that I be blindfolded when it was her turn. When it was mine, she timed me exactly, giving me eight minutes to get dressed. I was already done by the time she had finished counting, she had opened her eyes to find my face 3 inches away, glaring at her. I was a little annoyed at how much of a brat she was. I wanted to scare some sense into her. She had been silent all that morning.

"_Heeey? John? Hellooo?" she said, snapping her fingers in my face._

I jolted from my memories.

"_Pardon?_"

_She huffed irritably. _

"_I said, hurry up and get ready because we are going soon."_

_She stormed out. I sighed quietly. I was not the best at dealing

withâ€¦..children. Emily was one exception, I could ignore her but eventually she got overwhelming. She didn't seem to mind she was annoying me, someone who could harm her. She treated me like I was normal, something I enjoyed._

1 hour later

I plopped down into the car seat. John needn't get in the car, all he had to do was run alongside, and his enhancements meant he could easily keep up. Mum started up the car and off we went. I glanced out the window, thinking I could make out a shimmering shape running. I wondered what he was feeling, about how I thought we could get him back to his world. He couldn't stay here, Oliver and himself had made that perfectly clear. He had to show everyone that he was _there_. They didn't need to know who he was, but it must be hard for John to expose himself like that, after on the Infinity I could clearly see that he absolutely _hated_ attention. I settled down to wait for our impending arrival at Wirraglen.

I panted, not puffed. I wasn't tired, just hot. Running that fast produced a lot of heat from my muscles. I had arrived just after Emily; I had to slacken my pace for a short while. I may have super strength, but even I couldn't run that fast for very long. I watched as Emily leapt out of the car. Doubt swirled around in my head. I didn't want to make myself known. I didn't want other people to know what a freak I was. I stepped forward and tapped Emily's shoulder. She turned and whispered.

"_I can't interact with you while there are people around. It would look weird."_

She turned abruptly and started walking towards a small, bricked building surrounded by trees. I breathed in deeply, testing the air. It was sweet and smelt of nature; it was even better than the air in Emily's home. I followed about five meters away from Emily, making sure not to step in any patches of sunlight. They made my shimmer more visible. I also stayed away from large groups of people. I found that harder and harder to attempt when over the course of two hours, more people arrived. I took the time to observe other children. Emily seemed vastly different yet similar at the same time. They seemed to talk a lot about something called "Minecraft". I was confused a lot at some of the things they discussed. I knew they were something unique to this time. Emily and I had made up a sort of signal; she kicked the ground four times when she wanted me to come. She was doing that just now. One, two, three, four. I marched over and pulled on her hair gently.

"_Okay. I think it's time. Somehow Oliver got everyone into the Gazebo." she announced._

"_I will come."_

I walked over to the small building that would be where John would show himself. I could just hear quiet footsteps behind me. I was shocked that a person of John's size could walk so quietly. I ceased to hear them when I came close to the Gazebo; it sounded like a zoo in there.

"Oi! EVERYONE! IVE GOT SOMETHING TO SHOW YOU!" I hollered.

Everyone shut up and looked at me. I felt a slight breeze; I knew John had walked past. I waited patiently. Then he appeared, standing as he had when he had showed himself to Oliver, his blue eyes hard and cold, glaring about. He towered pretty much over everyone.

"Who is THAT!?" there was a collective gasp.

"He appeared out of nowhere?"

"Is he an alien?"

"Why is he so tall?"

"He's creepy!"

I looked about intently behind John's back, looking for that pesky light.

"And what is-"

People were cut off as the light appeared, right behind them. John stiffened. He would have to barge between them to get to it. I punched the air.

"Aha! I am ze genius! You shall call me Einstein!" I crowed triumphantly.

At that point, John had had enough of the whispers and ran toward the light. Just before he reached it he stopped.

"Thank you Emily. You gave me a chance to be a human."

"Aw shucks. Thanks. But you should go. They look like their eyeballs are gonna pop out of their head."

John's lips twitched and I resisted the urge to punch him. He turned and jumped into the portal light thingy. I smiled. That guy was fun, interesting, annoying, (I returned the favour sometimes) and completely AWESOME! But something was happening. I was moving. Towards the light. I dug in my heels and leaned backwards. It was taking me with it! I screamed. No! I don't know where it could take me! It could dump me into a lava pit for all I knew. I lost the desperate battle and I flew forwards. This time, the trip didn't take more than five seconds, dumping me roughly on the ground from 3 feet up. I opened my eyes. I was sitting on my (painfully bruised) bottom. The sand and dirt around me was ash grey and some of it looked like glass. There was a huge, broken up spaceship in front of me. It was at least as long as a skyscraper, and it was torn in half. The sky around me was dark grey, and there were many fires. Then I saw the bodies. I almost hurled up. There were alien and human carcasses. I looked away quickly, picking up a piece of the strange glass. It was dirty, and I realised, something had melted the dirt into the glass. I raced through my mind's memory banks. What could melt dirt. Lightning? No. This was definitely not Earth, and I didn't know what planets had lightning. Fire? No. The only fires seemed to be contained in the spaceship. Plasma? Yes. There were dead aliens. Aliens had plasma rifles. Then it hit me. I knew exactly where I was.

On a battlefield. And the battle-doers had all died.

And John was crouched ten meters away.

And his face was tear streaked.

Emily Taylor " The Light Page 19

3. Escape(Sequel)

Emily

The silence was terrible. Frayed wires and circuits drifted in the breeze, the wind whistling through holes in the spaceship.

"John?"

I shivered, feeling small. I hated the quiet. I hated the bodies. I hated myself for having eyeballs. John was kneeling on the ground, his eyes downcast. He seemed to be in some sort of trance and he did not respond when I called his name. I closed my eyes and walked over, remembering the landscape so I didn't have to look at the skeletons. I stopped and John's blinked. I touched him lightly on his shoulder, and he lifted his head. His eyes were completely blank and cold, emotionless. The shock had swallowed his feelings again. I didn't want to say anything, didn't want to disturb him, but I was scared and unsure. He was the only one who could help with that.

"Where are we?" I whispered.

John didn't respond, looking over my head into space somewhere.

"What's happening?"

"They are Spartans." he finally said, his voice stiff.

I forced myself to look at one of the less gross skeletons. Its bones gleamed like metal, and that was not normal. Spartan bones were coated with some kind of metal to make them almost unbreakable. I sniffed. I thought. I acted. I cried. This was too much. Too too much. I could not deal with this. Why? Why do we insist on having wars like this, even in the future?

"Their last names are numbers. And I recognize the first names."

What had he just said? Only one Spartan program had their candidates last names removed, from UNSC files, from their heads.

John's program. The dead Spartans were IIs. This was horrible. No wonder why he had cried. He seemed to be okay now, standing and glaring at the alien bodies. Man, he recovered quickly.

"Why did they fight? Couldn't their spaceship just run away?"

"It would have been boarded, the captain killed. It would have crashed."

"How are we going to get out of here?"

"We are not. We will ask someone to take us. There may be a radio inside the ship." he said in short sharp words.

This man was not happy, and I didn't think he would be for a while.

One hour later

Emily

I felt dizzy, so I sat down on one of the many supply crates littering the bridge. Many of the computers and monitors had been smashed, and what John was doing didn't help the picture. He was ripping metal plating off the wall; he was searching for the radio system. He'd spent the better half of an hour looking for the armoury, which he couldn't find to his obvious annoyance. He was clearly looking for weapons. He had also dragged me around with him, so I was dehydrated and my legs ached. He'd seemed to have recovered completely from seeing his dead Spartans outside. Yes, I said "his" because he was their commanding officer, well, until the war had ripped the squads apart. The Human Covenant War had caused all the strife, all starting from when an alien ship had landed on a planet called Harvest, requesting the planet as their own. I was interrupted in my musings by a loud crash as John threw a metal plate down. He turned and marched down the ruined corridor. He had done this all day; not bothering to check to see if I was okay, not bothering to see if I was following. His emotions were gone again; he had reverted back to what he had been like on the Infinity, cold, hard, uncaring. I trotted behind John, halting when he stopped to look up into the air vent. He was obviously looking for something and I didn't ask why, he probably wouldn't respond. He hadn't said a word after his pronunciation that there may be a radio. He walked for about ten minutes, not bothering to check if I was still there. He ceased walking finally as he reached a glass case. It was full of what looked like opaque computer chips. They were blue, and I recognized them. They were memory crystals, the equivalent of a HALO universe's USB drive. I watched John as his eyes roamed over them, flicking about restlessly. I heard a small shifting noise above me and I looked up, freezing in place as I did so. An alien was crouched on a roof panel above me, training a plasma rifle on John. I screamed.

"John! MOVE!"

It was too late, as John noticed the alien he threw himself to the right, but the superheated green plasma was too fast even for him. It scorched across his left flank, burning a whole instantly through the cloth and I could smell something ominously close to burning flesh. He didn't cry out, just fell on his side and got up. It was amazing. He was probably in terrible pain, but he didn't show it, blood running down his side and onto the metal floor. The alien jumped down, bending his knees with the weight of the impact. He threw away the plasma rifle, drawing his plasma sword instead. It was blue, with white along the edges, and it hummed quietly. He had four mandibles for a mouth and he was coated in thin grey armour. He leaped at John, but the Spartan was too quick, injured as he was and he dodged out of the way, slamming his fist into the side of the alien's head as he

went past. There was a sickening crunch as I watched in horror; John's hand appeared on the _other_ side of the alien's skull. I cringed. I quailed, and I hurled. I collapsed onto the floor, my guts emptying the last of my food onto it. After a minute I stopped and looked for John. He was crouching, his hand pressed to his side where the plasma had hit. He didn't look in pain, and his eyes were sharp and clear, his pupils narrowed. He seemed more interested in me than the thin trail of blood running down the side of his chest.

"John! You've..You've been hit! Go to the medbay!"

I stood and grabbed his arm, pulling him toward the direction of the medbay(There seemed to be one every hundred metres) frantically. He stood slowly, obviously hampered by his wound. It was obvious he didn't feel the pain, but physically his body was failing. I was angry that he walked calmly down the corridor after me, blood trailing behind him when he could die. The door to this medbay was smashed in and the only thing not overturned in the whole room was a bed with clean white sheets. I shoved him over, though it did nothing to his speed. He walked almostâ€¦ponderously over, sitting down on the edge of the bed.

"What do I do?"

He didn't reply.

"TELL ME!" I screamed.

He still didn't respond, although he grabbed a bandage from a table and began to wrap it around his middle, over his injury. The blood stopped as the layers got tighter and I realised that I didn't need to help him, he could help himself. I huffed. He could have _told_ me that I didn't need to do anything that it was alright. I was angry with him, and I knew that he realised it. Once he was done, he lay down on the bed, obviously to rest. He was completely ignoring me.

"What are you doing?"

"Keep searching for the radio." he said in a completely calm voice.

"What? I can't leave you!" I said indignantly.

"Look for the radio." he repeated.

"Butâ€¦Grrâ€¦Nevermind."

I ran non-stop back to the bridge, angry. By the time I arrived, I had used all my anger for fuel for my muscles. I would find the radio, and I would give it to John.

Three hours later

John-117

_I did not feel pain. Now that my emotions had disappeared, I could simply acknowledge and ignore it. I did not enjoy emotions one bit. Only happiness was one that I moderately liked. My mind drifted back to the Spartans. My Spartans. I had recognised many of the names on

those dogtags, felt the memories come washing back. Now I didn't care that they were dead. I was in a cold rage, showing it when I killed that Covenant waiting in the ceiling. I did not really care about Emily much anymore, although a small voice said that I should, that she was a friend. Some logic in my head said that friends were useful. I shoved away the voice, instead focusing on listening on the child who was even now, running back, honing my enhanced hearing on one sound of footsteps, light and quick. She was about fifty metres down the corridor, and I could hear her heavy breaths as she ran. I heard her voice explode into my head, cringing as my boosted hearing amplified the sound._

"_I found it! I did it! Jooohn!" she hollered excitedly as she burst into the room. I did not let on that her excited yells were deafening me._

Emily

I handed the radio box over to John, grinning happily. I had succeeded. He took it from me, examining it closely. The box was see through and I could see the circuits perfectly, and it fit neatly into his hand. John took one look and crushed the fragile box in his fist. I gasped in horror.

"It is fried. We cannot use it." he said.

I flopped down onto the bed next to him. A wave of exhaustion and disappointment washed over me; I had crawled through twenty _metres_ of maintenance tunnel, barging through wires and shards of metal. My left hand had a deep gash in it because one of the metal bits had sliced it. I held it to my side, attempting to slow the ooze of blood. It seemed okay and I did not feel the need to bandage it. John however thought otherwise, and nothing escaped his sharp eyesight. He turned his head, looking down at me. He grabbed my hand, turning it over, his pupils narrowing as he examined it.

"You are hurt."

"That sounds rich, coming from you. You could have _died._"

I was exhausted and extremely annoyed. He had crushed my hard work in an instant. I didn't particularly feel like being nice. I knew I should be kinder, he was _caring_ about me, and that was a big step after he had turned all "Spartan mode" on me.

John-117

_I examined the cut on the child's hand. It was deep, around one centimetre. It could get infected and I didn't particularly want to amputate her hand. I was a little concerned, I felt something for this child, I knew but I could not seem to resurrect the feeling. I knew I hadâ€¦_felt_ before, but now I could not. I remembered that I was _scared_ of emotions. That they complicated everything. I did not understand why this child could _feel_ _and_ do what was necessary at the same time. I did not believe emotions have a purpose. I pulled a bandage off the shelf in front of me and began to wrap it around her hand. This was an old ship, the medical supplies were not up to date and many of them were probably what Emily had in her world. Emily winced a little as I wrapped up her hand, but I paid no attention and carried on, taking great care to not break any of her tiny bones. I

finished and let go of her hand, and she did something completely unexpected. She knelt on the bed and kissed my cheek. I saw it coming but did not react. I wanted to see how it felt. It felt strange, but good at the same time. I knew that was a normal person's way of thanking someone. I knew that she was trying, _trying _to get me to feel. It didn't really work._

"_Thanks John." She said gratefully._

"_Do not ignore your injuries." I chastised._

"_C'mon John. Lighten up."_

I could not reply as bright sparks exploded in my vision and I could feel a sharp pain on the back of my head. I slid off the bed, collapsing onto the floor. I knew exactly what had happened; someone was trying to knock me unconscious. My head was on its side, on the floor and I saw Emily collapse, down for the count beside me. I felt a surge of anger that someone would treat her like that, but I set it aside as I knew that I had to ignore feelings. My brain urged to do the same as Emily's had, but someone rolled me over onto my back before my light snuffed out. My eyes adjusted to the setting sun through a hole in the roof above me and I looked up into pale blue eyes. They were set into a scarred feminine face, with thin eyebrows much like mine. Her lips were pressed together tightly, she was obviously not enjoying this or she was surprised. Spartans did not have a wide range of facial expressions. I wondered why I had called her a Spartan. The face struck me as familiar and my dazed brain provided me with the necessary information:

It was Kelly-087, a Spartan who had used to be in my squad.

And probably the fastest thing that had ever lived.

_I went out cold. _

Three hours later

Emily

I woke up with a jerk. Blood trickled down the back of my neck from a wound on my head. I attempted to feel it but found I couldn't. I yanked at my hands but found them bound together with rope, my feet restrained likewise to a metal chair. I was in a large room, which looked very much like every other room on the ship; metal plates, more metal plates and _more_ metal plates. I looked wildly around for John, and saw him at the other end of the room, a syringe stuck in his arm. His eyes were open and looking about, but he did not move, his body slack. I realised he was sedated weakly, enough so he couldn't move but his mind was coherent. I tried to scream but found I was gagged. I "Mrrffpttt!" frantically and a face appeared in front of me. I wanted to _bite_ whoever that was, I did not enjoy being tied up. My eyes focused and I realised it was a she. She loosened my gag and I spat murder at her.

"Oi! You! Who do you think you are! What did you do to John! Where are we? You psychopath!"

The woman's blue eyes seemed to narrow, suspiciously likeâ€¦John's? I examined her face. Her eyes seemed to have that steely coldness

that John's had, and her face was scarred like his as well. I realised I was looking at another Spartan II, a survivor. She ignored me and strode over to John. His eyes flicked upwards and I knew he was trying, trying to move. She yanked out the syringe, and I knew that John would be mobile soon.

"He's gonna chew you out, whoever you are, cause he is the Master Chief and the most badass person I know."

The other Spartan froze and spoke.

"Youâ€¦..Know?"

Her voice was somewhat lighter and less serious than John's and it did not have that undertone of command that his had.

"Hell yeah. And I have no idea what rank-"

"Petty Officer First Class."

"-you are, but he's gonna kick your ass out of this universe. I don't think he likes being sedated and I sure as hell don't like being tied up."

I snorted at "Petty" Officer.

"Oh I see. A "Petty" Officer." I smirked.

I enjoyed antagonising people, I realised. She whirled around, glaring at me, crouching and lowering her face centimetres from mine. I was a little surprised; her emotions were not as controlled as John's. I looked straight into her eyes, refusing to back down; she seemed to do the same. Slurred speech ended our stalemate.

"Stop it. Kelly, she is our ally."

The so called "Kelly" started in surprise. I relaxed as I realised who she was, the mystique fading away. She was Spartan-087, the fastest of all the Spartans. Her reaction times were even less than John's, which meant she could react in less than a third of a second. She also ran slightly faster, around 70km/h.

"John? How did you get here? And who is this child?"

I got a little annoyed at "child". I was almost thirteen! She referred to the Master Chief as John so it was obviously a close relationship. They had, after all, been in the same squad.

"She is my friend. Untie her."

I felt a little happier. He had referred to me as friend. Kelly simply broke my bonds. I sprung up, rushing past Kelly. I tried to get to John, who was trying to flex his legs and arms. He obviously couldn't feel them yet. Kelly flashed something and before I had even processed this, a hand was hooked around the neck of my shirt, pulling me back, choking me.

"Orruk! Hey! Let ME GO!" I coughed out.

"She doesn't come near you until I know who she is and why you are

here."

John sighed. He told Kelly about me coming to the Infinity, going to my world, coming here. Her grip loosened when he finished and I scrambled forward. By the time he had finished he was able to stand and I ran behind him, peeking out to stick out my tongue at Kelly. John fastened a hand around my shoulder and I felt a prick at the side of my neck. I realised John had stuck me with the rest of his sedative. I looked up at him with dismay.

"I am sorry. But I need to talk to Kelly _without_ you hearing."

I went out like a light.

John-117

_I stuck the syringe in Emily's neck and she looked up at me. Her gaze was filled with betrayal and sadness and I felt a little twinge. I didn't enjoy doing that to her. She fell limp and I caught her, laying her down gently onto the floor. Kelly shifted from foot to foot. She was so fast that she could not sit still for more than a minute. Back when she was in my squad, she had to actually slow herself _down _for me and the others._

"_So what will we do, John?"_

"_Did any escape pods fire?"_

"_Yes, two or three I think." she said, chewing her lip._

"_Then their radios may be functioning. Emily retrieved the radio from this ship and it was fried."_

"Emily_ retrieved the radio?" Kelly asked disbelievingly._

I frowned. Why did that sound so strange now?

"_Yes she did. Is that a problem?"_

"_Errâ€|no."_

"_Good. Do you know if any other Spartansâ€|survived?" I asked tenderly._

I was treading on broken glass here. Even though I was her commanding officer, our friendship meant she could challenge me. Kelly was known for having a quick temper.

"_Fred may have survived. I don't really know, once most of the Spartans had died we retreated into the ship. Fred and I split up and I don't know where he is. Linda ejected in an escape pod. She didn't arrive at the ship's crash site."_

_I felt a little better knowing that Frederic-104 was probably still alive and in the ship somewhere. Linda-058 was a different story. I wanted to find her, but Fred would be first. Some help would be useful. I felt a small amount of happiness entered my mind. All my old squad members would reunite and I could see them again. Kelly was excellent bait, her speed enabling her to distract enemies, earning her the nickname "rabbit". Fred had an uncanny skill with combat

knives and Linda was the finest sniper I had ever seen. The combination of these skills had made Blue Team the most formidable Special Forces squad in the UNSC's arsenal. The war had killed the fourth member, Samuel-034, also effectively separating Blue Team. I had considered him almost as my brother. I shoved away my grief; it had been more than twenty years ago. First, however, I needed help to find Fred. Two Spartans were hardly enough to search the spaceship's vast length._

"_John I am happy to see you. I missed you."_

I jolted away from my thoughts. I did not know how to respond to this. Some memory in my head knew how to, but it was too faint and I could not summon it.

"_Iâ€|.I missed youâ€|too Kelly."_

She sighed and I knew I had failed my attempted of stepping around the conversation.

"_John, we can't search the ship by ourselves."_

"_I know. But I know who can help us."_

"_Surely you don't meanâ€|."_

I was going to ask Emily to help.

And I did not think it would be easy.

Emily

I opened my eyes, focusing them on a scarred face. It was John, so I spat. I was not happy that he had sedated me. His head jerked and the spit sailed past.

"Emily, I require your help."

"And pwhat mwakes yhu think I whill?" I slurred.

"Because you will be finding Frederic-104."

I started in surprise.

"Wwhy?"

"So we have reinforcements. We will be looking for escape pods and Linda-058. The pods also may have a working radio."

"Ok. So you are looking for Fred, so we can look for Linda. Why the _heck_ would we need more people?"

I didn't understand. He didn't explain things very well, in his silent "man of few words" state.

"There may be Covenant around. We will need the extra help."

Just great. Juuuust great, I thought. Well, at least that explained it. I also thought that John was finding Fred for his own personal gain. He obviously wanted to unite his team again.

"Hmmmâ€¦.okay. But don't blame me if Fred kills me or something." I grudgingly agreed.

Two hours later

Emily

"We will split into teams. Kelly will be searching along the corridors of the starboard side; I will do the same on the port. Emily you will go straight through the middle."

Kelly saluted and whirled away, running into an access tunnel. I looked at John. He seemed to be thinking.

"I thought it would be best to separate you and Kelly." he announced.

I folded my arms.

"And why would that be?"

"Kelly is not exactly impressed that I have decided to take you along with us."

I growled. I turned and stomped down the main corridor through the middle of the ship. I didn't like being called a liability. I wasn't sure that I liked Kelly now. Some part of me wanted to prove that I wasn't useless. I looked everywhere as I walked, but I didn't spot anything out the ordinary. The walk was all uphill, so I stopped to take a rest and sat down on one of the metal peg-things that seemed to line the floor. I heard a soft thump, very similar to when the alien had jumped down. I shot upright, turning my head to look. Jesus. There was a man standing three metres away with brown hair and eyes. His face was scarred very much like John and Kelly's. Why do Spartans have to keep appearing like that? It scares me out of my wits! He advanced around me like two boxers do in a ring. I copied, my arms held in a ready position although I knew I was hopelessly outmatched. I mostly did it to show that I wasn't afraid. The initial shock had faded away. I thought it was Fred, because I remember reading that he liked to use combat knives, two of which he held currently in his hands. His eyes seemed to focus on mine, like he was trying to intimidate me. I glared back defiantly. He almost seemed curious, like I was a bug in an insect exhibit. He cocked his head to the side, almost an impression of John. I yelled, maybe John or Kelly would hear me. I didn't think Fred would keep this cautious curiosity up for long.

"Keeeeellly! Jooohn! I found him!"

Frederic-104

_The child yelled for two people, using names I remembered. She knew them? I twirled my knives restlessly. I didn't want to attack. She did not seem a threat, she was a civilian, and I did not attack them. This child was ferocious, glaring at me like I wasn't even holding weapons, like I was tiny. I was a little surprised, I had only encountered civilians screaming and running. I continued to circle around her. She followed suit, so I had some time to think. I knew Kelly had survived, but I couldn't find her. John however was a

different story. The Human Covenant War had ripped the Spartan IIs apart and it was sheer luck that Kelly, Linda and I and a few other Spartans had stuck together. I hadn't seen John for over twenty years. I decided that I would ask the child a question, because I was utterly stumped.

"John and Kelly?"

The child replied, her tone one of utter anger. She obviously was scared, but covering it up with rage-imbued words.

"Yeah, and they're gonna come and save me, you don't scare me one bit, you and your tough act and twirling knives."

Heh. This wasn't a tough act, it was my normal act. I darted forward, slipping my knives back into their sheaths and gliding past her, hooking my arm around her small neck. I didn't do it hard enough to choke her, but enough so that she was dragged backwards. Her small legs kicked wildly. The child viciously bit my arm, but I didn't feel anything. I turned around, so I was facing towards her back, looking over her head.

Emily

Fred put me into a hostage position, like I had seen in the movies when the murderer had a gun or a knife. I bit his arm, trying to get him to let ME GO. I didn't like the feeling that I was weak, that I couldn't fight back. I hollered loudly, knowing that his enhanced hearing would hurt his ears. I tortured him as best I could, so I felt a little better.

"I'll STOP WHEN YOU LET ME GOOOOOOO!" I screamed in a loud opera singer's voice.

John would probably hear me from one kilometre away. I could feel Fred's breath over the top of my head; he was at least two or three feet taller than me. I was probably hard for him to hold me in this position, considering that. I felt him shift behind me; it was obviously extremely uncomfortable, me yelling this close to his ear.

Kelly-087

I heard Emily clearly. She was obviously with Fred, because I didn't think that an alien would take her hostage. She wouldn't be saying anything at all if she had met one. I wondered if John had heard. I thought if I should let him take the situation, because I honestly did not think the child worth saving. Emily yelled out my name, Kelly, so she seemed to think that I would help her. I sighed quietly. John would chew me out if I didn't intervene. I ran back down the corridor at full pelt, my quick reaction times meant I could dodge any obstruction. I dug in my heels and skidded around the corner, coming face to face with John. I nodded to him and he did likewise, and we both ran straight through the middle of the ship. I saw Fred holding Emily, an arm around her throat. I slid to a stop.

Emily

Kelly and John came running down the hallway, so fast their legs were

blurs. I yelled again, enjoying the obvious discomfort that Frederic-104 was experiencing.

"SEE!? THEY CAME TO SAAAAAAVE MEEEEEE!"

I noticed Kelly and John flinching slightly, so I stopped. I knew I was safe anyway.

"John?" said Fred, his tone flat, but he was trying to mask up his disbelief and I knew it.

"I'll tell you later. Let the child go." he ordered.

Instead I felt the arm tighten, and I found it significantly harder to breathe. Twice. Twice I had been taken hostage today, first by Kelly. I gasped.

"Fred, let her go."

I was surprised that Kelly even cared; John hadn't seemed to think so.

"Frederic-104, I order you, let go of the civilian."

There it was, the _command._ Fred let me go, and I collapsed gasping, onto the floor. No one seemed to care that I was in a state of shock, sitting on the floor and rocking back and forth. The Spartans had a quick conversation and Fred was told of John and I's adventures. I heard Fred sigh with relief.

"I thought you were dead, John."

"It takes more than a few Covenant to kill me."

I didn't really hear this, as my mind was foggy. I was so scared from the incident with Frederic-104. I tried to tell myself that it wasn't his fault that he was just following what he had been taught since he was six. I felt a small tug and I was lifted to roughly to my feet. I looked upwards through my tear streaked eyes. They met a pair of icy-blue ones, John's.

"Are you okay?"

I noticed the crowd of faces around me. They didn't seem worried, just a little concerned. I didn't reply; my mind was playing back the horror and fear of being held hostage. Repeat. Rewind. Repeat. I couldn't handle it.

I passed out.

John-117

Emily's eyes closed and she fell limp. I gently lowered her to the ground. I knew what feeling she had felt, but I could not understand it. I glanced mean fully at Fred and he shifted uncomfortably.

"_Someone will have to carry her." I announced, looking sideways again at Fred._

"_I will, John." Fred reluctantly agreed._

I stepped back from Emily's limp body, examining her to make sure that she was not injured. She seemed to be fine, the expression on her face apparent to be one of peace. Frederic-104 strode forward, lifting the child over his shoulder in a fireman's carry position. He dwarfed the child, almost amusingly. His arms alone were wider than Emily's head. Kelly watched the scene with a small expression of disgust. She obviously was not impressed that Emily had fainted, meaning that she would hamper the team.

"_We should just tie her up and leave her here."_

"_She would starve and die. She is hungry already as it is. We all are." I replied with a hint of anger in my voice._

"_Kelly, what is wrong?" asked Fred._

_I already knew. Kelly was jealous. For some reason when I told her about the time that Emily had spent with me I could almost imagine her face turning green. I didn't know if Kelly actually _liked _me, I probably should ask Emily when she wakes up. She would know what to do._

Emily

I woke up on a medbay bed, yawning. I had somewhat recovered from the incident with Frederic-104 and now I was _hungry_. I looked about for one of the somewhat annoyingly suspicious and serious Spartan IIs. I spotted John just outside the door, and I attempted to catch his eye. He was standing three metres away, side on. He was talking with Kelly, and it seemed to be sternly. Fred was nowhere to be seen. I waited five minutes and decided I'd had enough.

"JOHN! I WILL EAT FRED WHEN HE COMES BACK IF YOU'RE NOT CAREFUL!"

The Spartans winced at my yells. I had found a weakness, and I enjoyed exploiting it. They seemed to realise it. John turned his head, and I shut my mouth instantly. His eyes seemed to suggest he was _very_ unhappy with my screaming. Kelly did the same. I blushed. I was trying to prove myself to them, and screaming like a toddler was certainly _not_ assisting me in my task. I looked at the floor, chastened. I sat there like that for twenty minutes, until I heard heavy footsteps and I looked up into brown eyes. It was Fred and he was holding what looked like a muesli bar out to me. I took it, mumbling gratefully. I looked into his eyes and he said something completely unexpected.

"I am sorry for scaring you earlier."

My eyes widened in surprise.

"Umâ€¦That's okay Fred. I knew it wasn't on purpose."

"Thank you. Could you please, preferably, not, _eat_ me?"

I rolled off the bed laughing, taking the expression "ROFL" (Roll on floor laughing) a little too seriously. I rolled onto my back and looked up at Fred, towering over me.

"Truce?" he asked.

I managed to stem my laughter.

"Truce." I agreed.

It sounded weird; it was something a kid would say after an argument. I guessed he thought of the word militarywise, like a ceasefire or something. I slowly got up, sometimes uttering small outbursts of giggling. I accidentally grabbed Fred's arm, trying to steady myself, but he didn't seem to mind, looking at me with amusement in his eyes. He was a little less serious than John. Kelly was just arrogant, with a fair amount of annoying in there too. I attempted to shut my mouth, I was a few feet away from Fred, and I didn't want my laughter to deafen him. I actually felt bad now.

"Ummâ€¦I'm sorry too, for screaming at you earlier. I knew it hurt your ears."

"It's okay. It is actually pretty smart, to find your enemies' weakness, and exploit it."

I grinned at the praise, and I felt like I could dance a little jig. Not one of these Spartans had ever praised me before.

"Please do not grow a big head Emily. John would most certainly notice."

I collapsed on the floor again, this time tears streaming from my eyes.

"Sâ€¦stopppp! I can't eat my food if you keep doing this to me! This torture!"

Frederic-104 was silent, and I knew he was doing it so I could finally stop laughing. I recovered and stood again, taking my weird food bar and biting into it. I almost spat it out. I tasted like cardboard. I looked at Fred with dismay, chewing disdainfully.

"It is dehydrated. It is the only thing to eat. It is barely enough for ourselves."

I guessed "ourselves" meant John and Kelly. I ate the bar then proceeded to glance past Fred's waist at them. They seemed to come to an agreement, Kelly looking at the floor and John nodding once. They both turned and observed Fred and I. Fred stiffened, and I knew that he could feel their gaze on his back. He turned and I walked next to him, glancing at John and Kelly nervously. I knew that they had been discussing me while I had been unconscious. They strode over, halting in front of me. John stepped forward, crouching so his eyes were level with mine.

"This could be dangerous. You could die. Are you sure you want to come with us? We are searching for the escape pods."

I tensed my jaw, trying to look tough. I knew what they were planning anyway, and I had pre-prepared a sentence.

"Hell yeah, John."

Two hours later

Emily

I thwacked away the leaves with my hand. The forest around me was dense and thick, the atmosphere chokingly heavy. I sweated, my bra sticking to me annoyingly. The Spartans and I had set out, but not before they had raided the food storage facility, also finding water there. They had also found some heavy duty bags which we had stuffed full of supplies. There was a long trek to the forest at the edge of the impact site, during so the Spartans had been silent and respectful, obviously thinking about their fallen comrades. The long ditch where the ship had ploughed into the earth was deep, at least ten or twenty stories so and just as wide. I looked ahead, trying to spot the sneaky Spartans. They moved so quietly, so stealthily, it was almost as if they weren't there. I sighed. My legs ached and I needed a drink. I didn't yell, because I knew the Spartans wanted stealth, and they could hear me anyway.

"Guys, c'mon. I don't have super strength and endurance and I almost certainly can't walk as fast as you."

I continued my painfully slow waddle, stepping over tree roots and vines. I eventually caught up with the Spartans, sitting on fallen tree logs. They were discussing something as I arrived.

"Do you know what planet this is?" asked John.

"No, we attempted to slipstream jump away from the Covenant ships, but we put in random coordinates to try and throw them off. We are in an unknown system." replied Kelly.

I decided to intervene, throwing myself down onto the ground in the small clearing.

"Well, that's demoralizing. Thanks, Kelly." I said, my voice dripping with sarcasm.

The Spartans turned their heads at the same time to look at me. It gave the effect of robots moving in sync, their eyes focusing on me. It was creepy.

"We need to keep moving. The first pod is still at least one or two kilometres away." assumed Fred.

"I agree." John approved.

"But we can't make good time, because of _her." _ Kelly snorted.

"Then we won't make her walk."

John glanced meaning fully at her.

"Are you suggesting I carry her?"

"Yes."

Kelly grumbled angrily.

I smirked.

Four hours later

Emily

We arrived at the first pod, the Spartans barely tired. John began to search the craft, looking for the radio. The small craft rocked wildly and his head poked out of the entry bay.

"There are bodies in here, none of them Spartans. The radio is fried as well, and I don't think Linda was in this one."

I sighed tiredly, flopping down onto the ground. I heard a branch snap behind me and I whirled around, standing up. Kelly and Fred had already done so, crouching into a ready position. There was silence for a few seconds. One, two, three, four, fi-. My thought was cut off as two huge aliens, the same kind that had attacked John, charged out of the bush, drawing their plasma swords. Each was larger than the Spartan IIs, at least eight or nine feet. Kelly dodged nimbly to one side, and Fred ducked under the swords. John ran to stand in front of me. I was surprised and happy. I watched the scene, peering past John's waist. Kelly was a blur, dodging and weaving the punches and sword swipes the aliens attempted to hit her with. She grabbed its wrist, snapping it instantly. It roared and dropped its plasma sword, and she drew her combat knife, burying it into its neck. It snarled once, then fell to the ground and was still. Fred had simply broken the Covenant alien's neck with an uppercut. My mouth dropped open. I hadn't seen anything move so fast in my life. Neither of the Spartans seemed even the slightest puffed.

"Holy CRAP!" I exclaimed.

John, Kelly and Fred exchanged looks.

"We need to find the next escape pods, a radio and Linda fast. There could be more."

I groaned. More walking.

Over the course of the day we found one more pod, John pronouncing the radio fried as well. Linda was also not present, no tracks or trace found of her. I currently walked at the end of the single file line, bringing up the rear. I was talking to John, who had let Fred take point position for a while, dropping back to keep an eye on me.

"So what we gonna do if we find Linda but not a radio?"

"Then we will find the Covenant's temporary base and hijack a ship."

They had encountered four more aliens on their trek, leading Kelly to think they must have a base.

"Hey John, I always wanted to ask, what do you think of the Spartan IVs?"

He thought for a moment.

"Unprofessional and reckless. Sarah in particular. They seem to think that they know what they are doing yet clearly they don't."

"Yeah, I once read an article back in my world that they had special stuff done to their muscles or something. I didn't really pay attention that much, but apparently I think the enhancement was almost as good as yours."

"I don't think so. They seemed sluggish when I practised my hand to hand combat on them. I could dodge them easily."

I giggled at "on them", and I thought of the hurt egos they must have sustained.

"They can also run at around seventy kilometres per hour without their armour."

John raised his eyebrow, ever so slightly.

"I can run that fast with armour."

"Oooh, aren't you mister competition?"

He proceeded to look down at me and glare.

"John, move to point position." came a soft voice ahead of us.

I ran after him, even though he was just walking briskly. Fred and Kelly were staring at something.

It was Linda, standing in front of an escape pod. She had orange hair and green eyes and she was surrounded by at least twenty Covenant. I knew that the Spartans would be hard pressed to kill them all. John's eyes narrowed angrily and his pupils shrunk like they do when he thought. I noticed that he seemed to favour his left arm and leg and I realised that he was still quite injured. The bandage around his side was soaked with blood, the wound hadn't sealed itself properly yet. I was worried, I knew that he seemed to be fine, but he was in danger of dying.

"We will have to fight head on. I'm not letting Linda die."

"You're hurt John. You won't be able to fight." pointed out Fred.

"Besides, who will use the radio? The escape pod's need a power source to work." said Kelly.

"That's what I've been thinking about. And I know the perfect person. Emily will do it. She is small enough to run through the battle without being noticed."

I gasped. I could get killed! But I knew very well that we would die anyway if we couldn't get to the radio. The Spartans turned to me, questioningly, their gazes asking me if I would agree. I nodded firmly.

"Emily Taylor, master of stealth at your service. I'll do it."

"John, you be careful. I don't want you dying and the rest of us surviving." said Kelly.

"On three. Two, one. Go!" John ordered.

They charged out, and I stayed behind. I was waiting until they got the fight underway. Three aliens were dead in ten seconds, the big ones that had attacked us before. A swarm of little ones ran out of the escape pod, yelling and waving their hands about. They had gas masks and a small tank on their back, they obviously couldn't breathe oxygen. The other big Covenant reacted and drew their plasma swords; they clearly thought the Spartans would be fighting in close quarters. I decided it was time and ran out, darting into the escape pod. I looked about frantically for the radio, and I squeezed into the cockpit. I spotted it and pressed the small switch next to it, grabbing the headset on the dash. I began repeating the sentence that John had drilled into me, broadcasting over all frequencies.

"Any UNSC personnel please respond. We are on an unknown planet and need immediate evac. All personnel please respond. Covenant are present, I repeat, Covenant are present."

On the UNSC Infinity

Sir, we are picking up a radio signal, very similar to that of an escape pod. It's coming from coordinates that has not been travelled to yet. Would you like me to amplify it?" asked a monitor operator . He glanced at the man standing on the edge of the window, looking into space. He turned and spoke.

"_Permission granted. Put in through the speakers." commander Thomas Lasky ordered._

The voice was very hard to understand, and was breaking up badly.

"_Annâ€|.y UNSâ€|Personeâ€|pleaaaaâ€|.respond. We are
ooonnnâ€|unknowâ€|..anet
neeeeeedâ€|.evaaaacâ€|..allâ€|personeâ€|..pleaâ€|.respond.
Covenaaaantâ€|.are preseâ€|.I reepeat, Covenannt are
prrrreesentâ€|."_

_The commander started in surprise. Could that be the ship that had disappeared, the precious cargo of the remaining Spartan IIs nowhere to be found? He thought he could recognize the voiceâ€|.Could that be Emily? Had she appeared with John? The Spartan II had gone through that light. _

"_Sir, I have a fix on the signal. Shall we initiate a slipspace jump and investigate?" asked another deck officer._

"_Roger. Fire up the translight drive."_

A round, rotating hole appeared in the front of the ship, no light emanating from it. The UNSC Infinity slipped inside, the hole in space and time closing behind it.

Emily

I repeated the sentence over and over again until a noise behind me broke me away from my task. I barely heard it through the ruckus outside. I turned and screamed. A small alien was pointing a stubby plasma pistol at me. I froze in terror. I didn't have a gun, so I couldn't shoot it. I closed my eyes and waited for my impending death. I heard the alien screech in pain and my eyes snapped open. Linda-058 had stuck a combat knife into its back, and spoke quickly to me. The alien collapsed to the ground, dead.

"Keep transmitting. If the Infinity slipspace jumps to this location, she will be attacked by the remaining Covenant ships orbiting. There is a chance she may deploy a Pelican to evac us while she fights. She may have a strong enough signal on us to reply."

I took the advice and continued repeating the same sentence, my voice cracking. Linda rushed back outside, presumably to continue the fight. My throat was dry, and the Spartans IIs had drunk the rest of the water. I finished one repetition and I must have jumped at least a foot off the seat as a strong and clear voice replied. I felt a flush of excitement as I realised the voice was Thomas Lasky.

"We hear you loud and clear. We are engaging numerous Covenant ships currently, a team of Pelicans should arrive shortly. UNSC Infinity out."

Kelly-087

I dodged the plasma sword easily. My incredible speed meant that it moved in slow motion. I punched upwards, breaking the Elite's neck instantly. I heard a roar and a whoosh behind me and I ducked and whipped around, swinging my fist. It connected with the alien's sword arm and I felt it give way, the sharp points of bone erupting from its wrist. It roared in pain and dropped the sword, and I picked it up, igniting it again. I slashed the Elite in half, and tried to do the same with the next one, but the plasma sword was out of energy and it spluttered and died. I swore, dodging again and breaking the alien's skull with a punch. I couldn't keep this up for long, the damned evac better come soon. More Elites swarmed out of the forest and I realised it had been an ambush. I spotted Fred single handedly fighting three of the big aliens, his combat knives wreaking havoc. Linda had joined in the fight as soon as the Covenant's attention was diverted. John used his impressive strength, matching punches with the Elites.

UNSC Infinity

Calculations ran rapidly through his head as he called out degrees, guiding the Infinity to fire upon the Covenant ships. The Infinity's database confirmed one of the three ships to be a CAS-Class Assault Carrier, its name Shadow Of Intent. The other two were CPV Class Heavy Destroyers, the database naming one Esteem, the other unknown. Alone, they were no match for the UNSC Infinity, but as one they could break down her shields.

"_One hundred and thirty degrees, fire one MAC round at Assault Carrier."_

_Magnetic Accelerator Cannons fired fifteen centimetre rounds, with one point one gigajoules of kinetic energy. Lasky was aiming to destroy the carrier's shields before firing the Infinity's Archer

missiles. The round spat from the nose of the Infinity, pummelling into the alien ship's shields, but they held. Their energy was depleted, however._

"_Fire three hundred Archer missiles at hostile carrier."_

The deck crew complied, the missiles speeding toward the purple Covenant ship. As some made contact with the shields, the nearly impenetrable barrier collapsed and others smacked into the spaceship, ripping it in half.

"_We're taking fire sir! Our shields are holding strongly."_

Blooms of light exploded around the Infinity, the Heavy Destroyers firing their plasma cannons at her.

"_Fifty degrees! Fire primary MAC cannons, three seconds after each other!"_

The deck crew increased the power to the Infinity's engines and fired the port manoeuvring rockets, the five kilometre long ship yawing to the right. One MAC round spat from the nose of the Infinity, closely followed by another. The Heavy Destroyers' shields were not as strong as the carriers, one MAC round destroying it, the shield disintegrating with a flash of light and the second round slammed into it, ripping the front of it off.

"_Shields at fifty percent sir!"_

"_Ninety degrees! Repeat previous firing solution!"_

The second Heavy Destroyer fell to the Infinity's might.

"_Send a Pelican squadron down to the planet, give them the coordinates to the radio signal location."_

"_Aye, aye sir." _

Emily

"Engagement of hostile ships successful, Pelican squadron has been sent down to dust you off."

I pressed the transmit button.

"Roger, roger, all Covenant at our location defeated, awaiting evac."

I grinned happily, turning to look at the Spartans watching me. They, surprisingly, produced a small smile as well.

"We're getting out of this hellhole! Yeeha!" I crowed.

Three days later

Emily

John was expected to make a full recovery, and I was glad of it. I sat on the bed in my old room on the Infinity. John had seemed to return to his stoic-yet-slightly-funny attitude in a few days. I told

myself he went like that because he had been in a combat situation, and that his mind automatically changed itself.

"Emily? Thomas would like to speak to you."

Cortana appeared on the hologram projector next to the bed. I sighed. I was still tired from the incident on the planet.

Twenty minutes later

Emily

"I called you here to discuss your future. As of yet, that strange light has not appeared to take you back. My question is, what would _you_ want to do while you wait?"

I thought for a moment. I shifted on the hard chair in the small grey room.

"I wanna clean the Spartan's armour!"

Sarah Palmer grinned, speaking for Thomas.

"That can be arranged!" she said enthusiastically.

I groaned. She probably would make me polish and wax it as well.

4. The Mob Goes Elsewhere (sequel)

THE MOB GOES ELSEWHERE

Emily

"Race ya to the Climbing Tree from the Wirraglen building!" I challenged.

Chloe eyed me cautiously. She knew what she was up against, a lean speed machine. For some reason, after John and the other Spartans and I had escaped from the planet, they had given me some sort of fitness regime. Probably cause I complained so much when we were trekking across the unknown planet. Now I was the fastest kid ever at Wirraglen. I grimaced as remembered the training. More like torture. I had to deal with that for a week before that damned light had taken me back. A loud thumping noise alerted me to Chloe's sly decision. CHEATER! She had run ahead, her long brown hair flowing in the breeze. Time to show her what real speed was. I leapt from a standstill to an all-out run, flashing past kids. I was goin so fast I couldn't see their faces. Small, soft, oval shaped green leaves drifted down slowly around me, oblivious to the heated race that was going on. I passed Chloe, turning to run backwards.

"You messed with da master!" I crowed. Chloe scowled fiercely.

"How do you do that? Not faaaaaairr!" she complained.

I continued running, sliding to a stop at the Climbing Tree. I dug in my heels like I had seen John do. As Oliver and Daisy were waiting, I decided to show off a little. I twisted to the side, skidding along

and spraying dirt everywhere. Oliver threw up his hands to protect his face.

"Eurrrgh! STOP IT!"

"But I am stopping!" I said cunningly.

Oliver screwed up his nose. His short brown fringe drifted in the wind.

"I think he has imprinted on you too much."

I shushed him. Chloe arrived, puffing and panting.

"Whaazat? Whaaatz yhu say?"

I grinned wolfishly.

"Too late! You missed it! Along with your victory!"

"Something about you know who?"

I growled inwardly. Sticky beak!

"None of your business. Oliver? Why is your dad here? Shouldn't he be at work?"

His mother and father, Rose and Samuel were trudging slowly up the slope to the climbing tree.

"Eh, I think he gets off early today. Not sure."

I leaned back against the Climbing Tree's trunk, the bark worn smooth by the hundreds of feet that had trod on it. I lifted myself up onto a fork and waited for them to arrive.

"What brings you here, fellow humans?" I questioned.

Oliver giggled.

"Your mo-"

The light decided to appear behind him. Yes. The light. Chloe's eyes widened as she recognised it. Oliver's mouth dropped. Daisy dropped her bag. Samuel gaped. Rose froze. I cursed.

"Not again! DAMN YOU DESTINY!"

And we were sucked in.

I opened my eyes and the first thing I said wasâ€¦

"OWWWEEEEEE!" I hollered.

I had landed on Rose. Daisy, luckily, had landed on Oliver and not the other way round. I checked above me. Thank God Chloe wasn't sitting on me. She appeared a meter away, landing on her bottom.

"Ow!" she exclaimed.

Samuel was nowhere to be seen. I had a look around. We were in a largish room, all metal. Neon lights glowed above my head. Strangely, there was no furniture. But there was something watching us, and I was pretty sure it was alive. I scrambled off of Rose, slipping over and landing on my face. I was staring at a pair of black boots. I sat back, looking up. Into an unimpressed looking face with a lot of scars and icy-blue eyes, his spiky black hair outlined as he looked down at me.

"ARRGH! JOHN?! Oh. Hi."

He raised an eyebrow inquiringly.

"Don't gimme that look! You know the drill, light appears, you get sucked in, voilà ."

He looked over my head, observing my friends in his cold, calculating way.

"_More _of them?" asked a voice from behind me.

I turned to look, receiving a face full of lapels and epaulettes, and extremely shiny buttons. The owner of the blinding array of shiny metal things had a familiar face, with brown eyes and hair, slightly wrinkled. I shielded my eyes from the intense glimmer created from his ridiculously polished buttons.

"Ugh! Thommaaas! Why?!"

He smiled a little.

"Good to see you too." he said sarcastically.

Daisy

_Emily cringed away from the man-with-shiny-stuff, exclaiming in surprise. He said something and Emily gave him a nasty look. A big woman was standing behind him in white armour, she looked similar to the things that daddy liked, from Halo. She had copper hair and she was watching me intently. I was more worried by the big-scary-man-with-creepy-eyes. I was thankful he was watching my seven year old brother, Oliver. However, the man seemed to know I was watching him and his eyes flicked over to me. I shuffled backwards as far as I could on my bottom, but I reached the wall and stayed there. Scary man! I wanted mummy! But she was on the other side of this guy. Daddy? I couldn't see him anywhere. I looked up at the scary-man's eyes. They seemed to grow curious. I sniffed and a tear rolled down my cheek. I wanted mum! The icy eyes grew slightly concerned. I squeezed my eyes shut, and three more big tears leaked out. I heard a slithering, sliding sound and I opened my eyes to look. The big man had crouched, catlike in front of me, his hand on its way to my face. I flinched away, but the hand did not heed it and continued. I closed my eyes again, waiting to see what would happen. Nothing did. I looked again and I found that he had flicked away my tears. His head was cocked to the side, his eyes curious, like I was a new zoo animal. He looked into one of my eyes then the other, like he was a child learning, examining. He seemed satisfied and he stepped back, leaving the way for mummy clear. I looked up at him and stood. He wasn't scary anymore. The way he cocked his head to the side was

kinda cute, like a puppy. I liked puppies. Everyone was watching; even Emily stopped squabbling with the man-with-shiny-stuff, pausing with her mouth open._

"_Daisy, come here please." mummy asked._

I ran over, leaping into her cuddle. I turned to look at the big man. He was watching me with that look again. I grinned as widely as I could at him. He cocked his head again, and this time I thought I could just make out the ghost of a smile.

Emily

"Errumâ€|.Oliver, Daisy, Roseâ€|..That's Master Chief Petty Officer John-117, this guy over here with the annoying shiny stuff is Commander Thomas Lasky, and this big woman over here in the shiny white stuff is Spartan Sarah Palmer. She's the Spartan Commander, but try not to tell her or she'll brag.

I shot Lasky another glare. I was personally going to dirty his shiny stuff after this. Rose blinked.

"But they're from the game that my husband playsâ€|?"

"Trust me. They are real. The Master Chief is real."

I poked John multiple times and he glowered at me. Chloe poked him too.

"Huhâ€|.So he is, so he is."

John, naturally, didn't comment. He just glared at Chloe as well.

"So the big scary man has a name? Haaaiii! John!" yelled Daisy.

She jumped up and down in front of him, waving her hands about. John's eyes fixed on her hands, flailing about. He also cringed. She was yelling at him, and of course, she deafened him.

"Ermâ€|.Daisyâ€|..You do realise that you're making him deaf?" I asked.

"Eh? Nope. Okay then, sorry John. But hai anyway."

We all stepped back from John. I knew that he didn't like to be crowded and that he didn't like attention, partly because he was so different. And, just then, for some reason, Samuel decided to make an entrance. Onto John. He appeared a meter above him, landing on his shoulders. John grunted, but his knees barely bent and his eyes flashed up, glittering with dangerous intent. He fell to the ground, rolling over Samuel. The struggle was over in less than ten seconds, ending with Samuel pressed to the ground with a combat knife to his throat. I leapt forward, knowing what he was about to do. I thumped the end of my fist onto his shoulder blades, yelling. I knew it would distract him.

"OI! JOHN! FRIEND! ALLY! WHATEVER!" I screamed into his ear.

I continued to pound him, feeling the muscle running over his shoulders shift as he recoiled uncomfortably away from me.

"OFF!" I repeated.

Sarah Palmer finally decided to step in.

"Petty Officer John-117, stand down." she commanded.

The reaction was instantaneous and relieving. John sprang up and away, stepping away from Samuel. He glanced at me with some apology noticeable. He sheathed his combat knife. Rose scrambled past me, and the others just stood gaping. John had moved like lightning. I punched John on the arm and scowled at him.

"That's my friend's father you just messed around with!"

"You really gotta stop trying to kill people." commented Oliver, standing next to me.

"I can't." he said quietly.

He turned away, closing his eyes. I shoved Oliver sideways, the message clear.

Really? C'mon. You went there?

Daisy tugged on my sleeve and I looked down.

"What's wrong with John?"

"Oliver just said something nasty, that's all."

Daisy decided to meter out punishment for me; she stood on his toes and he howled, jumping backwards. Samuel had now recovered, and was rubbing his neck. Rose fussed around him. He glared at John, whose gaze was suddenly focused full strength on him. He looked away. I expected as much.

"So where the heck even are we?" asked Chloe.

Lasky answered her.

"You are on the pride and joy of the UNSC fleet, the Infinity."

"What kind of fleet? I don't hear any water."

Sarah snorted.

"Spaceship." she coughed.

Samuel gaped.

"INFINITY?! But..butâ€|that's in a computer game!"

For some reason John decided to sharpen his knife.

"Nope! This guy here is John-117, you probably know him as the Master Chief, that over there is Commander Thomas Lasky, and that rather big

grumpy looking woman over there is Commander Sarah Palmer!"

Palmer scowled. I grinned wider.

"I'm not fat!" she exclaimed.

I raised both eyebrows incredulously.

"Then it must be your armour making your butt look big."

"Can you get back on subject? Where are we? Why did we all suddenly get here in a flash of light?" asked Samuel.

"Okay. You're in the year 2558, Halo world, in space, on the Infinity. The "light" brought you here."

"Why?"

I growled as my answer. Samuel pointed to John.

"So you're saying that's the Master Chief?"

"Ja." I said with a German accent.

"How am I supposed to know you aren't tricking me?"

"I'll show you his hearing then. You know Spartans can hear a pin drop in a sandstorm, right?"

I walked twenty meters away to the other wall and whispered a sentence.

"John wins, you lose, better go drink booze."

John cocked his head to the side, listening. I ran over as he was repeating the sentence. Oliver, Daisy and Chloe killed themselves laughing. The flat monotone coupled with a straight face and the silly sentence was extremely funny. Sarah covered her mouth with an armoured hand, failing to cover up her amusement; snorting. Thomas grinned. Rose seemed to fail to cover up her laughter too, and she smirked. Samuel's mouth dropped and he backed away.

"It really is."

I turned to Lasky.

"So what you going to do to us? Urrm. I mean, with us."

He thought for a moment.

"I don't know. What kids do? Explore?"

I widened my eyes in mock shock.

"You would let us run about and trash the Infinity? Yee haa!"

He shot me a sarcastic look.

"Yes, go smash through the three meters of titanium A battleplate on this door."

He opened it with his keycard, exposing the busy nature outside. People were carrying things, little buggies were driving about in the long, tall grey hall.

"You expect us to go through THAT? It's worse than a shopping spree!" Chloe exclaimed.

"Wellâ€¦I suppose I could lock you in hereâ€¦" Lasky threatened, stepping outside along with John and Sarah, reaching forward to scan his keycard again and lock the door.

"Nooo! Waaait! I show them around! I've been here before, remember?" I yelled.

John raised an eyebrow. I scowled and Samuel noticed the exchange. He glanced at me curiously.

"You're friends aren't you?"

I tossed my head impatiently, dragging Oliver, Daisy and Chloe out the door.

"Yeah, so what."

"Nevermind. You wouldn't understand."

John reacted by glaring.

"She would understand perfectly. She is not dumb."

Samuel's eyes widened. His voice confirmed that it was in fact John, and that this wasn't a hoax.

"John! Can you take the boring adults? I wanna "explore" with my friends." I said, glancing haughtily at Lasky.

John cocked his head to the side, glancing at Palmer. Probably asking permission. She nodded, and the Spartan II glanced expectantly at Samuel and Rose. They didn't move and he blinked three times.

"JUST GO WITH HIM!" I roared.

They were startled into action and John wheeled about, striding away with the parents in tow.

"Well, that's done then, I suppose. Come on then."

Ten minutes later

I walked along a cat walk with Oliver, Chloe and Daisy, looking down into the mass of Spartans. The room was huge, at least one hundred meters high, and just as wide. A lot of the Spartans were on treadmills lining the middle, probably training. They didn't seem to be running very fast.

"Wow. There are a lot of themâ€¦" Oliver commented.

"Yeah, but they are all sucky Spartan IVs." I huffed.

"Look at that one!" Chloe exclaimed, pointing.

She was showing me one with short blonde hair and brown eyes. He didn't seem to notice us. We were ten meters above his head, anyway.

"What about him?" I asked.

"Lemme see! Lemme see!" cried Daisy.

"Umâ€¦he's kinda cute, I suppose."

I snorted. Spartans tend to be cute far away, but scary up close.

"Shutup Chloe! He's waaaay older than you. Spartan IV's were conscripted as adults. Come off it."

"Well, you think John is cute, don't you?"

I frowned thunderously, like John.

"_I am not cute_." I said, mimicking him.

Oliver killed himself laughing.

"You do that really well, sounds just like him."

"Who's that?" Chloe pointed at yet ANOTHER Spartan.

I squinted. He towered above the rest of the crowd, watching another Spartan of similar size running on a treadmill. It was a she, and I recognized the pair.

"Frederic-104! And Kelly-087!"

I charged down the catwalk steps, Oliver and Chloe puffing and panting behind. Daisy trumped along slowly. I barged through the Spartan IV's, and made it to Fred.

"Hai! Fred!"

He whirled about.

"Emily?"

"Yeah! Hi Kelly! Nice running, by the way."

She was running at sixty kilometres an hour. She smiled a little at me, and then continued.

"I heard you appeared with someâ€¦_friends_." Fred said, examining Chloe.

"Ya. That twelve year old you're scrutinizing rudely is Chloe, and this is Oliver. He's only seven, and that little girl over there is Daisy."

Fred cocked his head to the side like John, ignoring completely the "rudely" comment.

"Heeyâ€¦.John does that doesn't he?" Oliver asked.

"Yeah, that's cause Fred is in his squad! He's a Spartan II as well! So is Kelly."

Chloe waved, grinning.

"Hai!"

Fred proceeded to tilt his head further.

"Why is your friend flailing her hand at me?"

Wow. I knew the Spartan II's were socially deficitâ€¦..But not so much they didn't know what "waving" was."

"She's saying hello."

"Is it normal to say hello like that?"

Chloe and Oliver watched the exchange closely.

"Umâ€¦.Yeahâ€¦"

Fred nodded, Kelly observing quietly, besides the thumping of her feet on the treadmill.

"Okay. I'll remember that."

"I-"

The floor rolled under my feet, tilting to the right. Everything and everyone slide sideways. I went with it, smacking my head on a treadmill. I knocked myself out.

Frederic-104

The floor rolled to the right, throwing everything around. Not me, however. I whipped out my combat knife sinking it into the soft metal of the floor. I grabbed Chloe and Oliver, tucking them under my left arm, my right on the knife. I glanced around for Kelly and Emily. Too late for Emily, as the floor continued to pitch almost vertically, she slid and whacked her head, knocking herself out. Kelly had done the same as me, Daisy attached to her leg. Three Spartan IV's slid past, grabbing onto my leg. The weight my knife was supporting tripled. I watched as it began to slip out of the hole I had put through the metal. Chloe watched too, Oliver hiding his eyes in my arm. Chloe reached forward for a now horizontal bar. I let her go and she hoisted herself up onto it and the weight lessened. Then, the moment was over. The floor levelled, and I got up, setting down Oliver and running to check on Emily. She had hit a treadmill. I grabbed her head, tilting it in my hands. The impact hadn't seemed to puncture her skin, just knocking her out. She stirred, mumbling.

"_mpfmâ€¦..John?"_

"_No. Fred." I replied._

Her eyes opened, unfocused and rolling about. She was concussed and probably amnesiac. Chloe and Oliver scrambled over, tripping on overturned objects, and occasionally, a Spartan still on the floor. Kelly crouched next to me.

"_She alright?" Oliver asked._

I didn't reply, lifting Emily up with ease and putting her over my shoulder.

"_I'm taking her to the medbay. I want to make sure she doesn't have any brain damage."_

"_That's a bitâ€¦..worryingâ€¦_" Chloe muttered._

"_Poor Emilyâ€¦_" murmured Daisy._

I turned and strode through the middle of the mess, walking to the hallway at the end of the room. People scrambled to get out of my way, cleaning up the mess. Emily fell limp again, unconscious.

Emily

I felt a soft mattress and pillow under my body and head. I cracked open my eyes and saw a blurred mess of faces and eyes. One pair in particular stood out, an unbelievable icy blue. They came into focus and I noticed that they seemed fixed on me. The faces also came into focus. Oliver's little brown face had a worried frown on it and his soft chocolate eyes were worried. Daisy's blue eyes looked brimming with tears. Samuel was chewing his lip nervously. Rose was the same. Fred looked down at me too, his usually hard brown eyes soft and concerned.

"Errrhâ€¦|Hawat happand?" I slurred sleepily.

John replied.

"The Infinity engaged two alien ships. She had to roll sharply. Lasky sends you his apologies."

"Hehâ€¦|That's aw ri'"

Chloe's head appeared.

"You okay Emily?"

"I dushunno! Iwm nut a dactor!"

"She's alright." smirked Oliver.

I sat up and became aware of a dull ache in my head and I remembered I got knocked out. I looked about the room. It was white and only about five meters in diameter and six in length. The door was closed, but through the windows I could see it branched off from a white hallway. People came and went along it, pushing trays of delicious food. My stomach growled agreement. The Wirraglen gang didn't react, probably because they didn't hear it, but John's lips twitched in the ghost of a smile. His eyes flicked over to the low bedside table on my left. I glanced over and saw a whole plate ofâ€¦|.._chicken and

sauce!_ My mind screamed to scoff it. Oliver picked it up and gave it to me, and I grabbed it eagerly.

It was gone in less than three minutes. I yawned widely and snuggled down.

"What's the time?"

Fred blinked at me funny.

"We are in space. No time."

"Yeah, EARTH time. I'm tired and I don't particularly want to fall asleep in the middle of the day."

A doctor strode in. He overheard the conversation and commented.

"It's around five pm. I'm here to check on the reports your monitoring machine has created. I apologize for my rudeness, but Emily's friends will have to leave. She needs to rest, she had a particularly nasty bonk on the head."

John and Fred shrugged. They turned and strode out. Oliver, Daisy and Chloe waved bye and ran out the door, almost crashing into a food platter. Rose and Samuel followed more slowly. I noticed Kelly wasn't here and I made a mental note to yell at her when I found her. The doctor rummaged around for a while then left me to my devices.

In that case,

I slept.

Fourteen hours later

Emily

I woke up, yawning. I tried to sit up, but found a particular head resting on my lap. John had dragged a chair next to my bed, but he had fallen asleep, falling sideways. I was quite happy that he had cared. As I moved his eyes opened a crack, then blinking away sleepiness instantly. He sat up quickly and I giggled as I saw his spiky black hair was flat on one side. He gave me a withering look.

"Your hair. NOT you."

I slid out of bed, my feet landing on the smooth white floor. Someone had taken my dirty sneakers off for me. I alleviated my wedgie caused by my jeans and walked around the base of the bed, intending to help John fix up his bedhair. I reached up, but he straightened his back and leaned away.

"Oi! Im trying to help!"

John blinked innocently, but slightly sarcastically. I resisted the urge to punch him.

"Master Chief Petty Officer, John-117 if you don't bend down this-"

"Or what?" he interrupted, finishing the familiar threat.

I scowled at him.

"This is what."

I pinched him as hard as I could on his arm, through his long sleeved grey shirt. He didn't even twitch. He blinked at me curiously.

"Are you doing something?" he asked.

I growled.

"Fine. Walk around with a flat head then."

I sighed. It was lonely with no-one to talk to in the medroom. John's eyes grew concerned.

"Are you feeling okay?"

"It's just so lonely in here. Chloe and Oliver and Daisy are probably off somewhere, trashing Lasky's office or something."

I grinned as I imaged them frolicking about in a room, throwing papers everywhere and Thomas yelling at them, his face beet red. John shifted, glancing at the door, his blue eyes uncertain.

"I cannot stay here all day."

"I know. Go off, then. I'll go explore."

To my dismay, he shook his head.

"The doctors say you are still concussed."

I snorted, tossing my hand dismissively.

"I'm fine."

He turned away from the door.

"No. You will stay here. I will not be pleased if you disregard my wishes."

I sighed.

"Okay. Then. Go off and romp in sunshiny meadows then."

He raised an eyebrow, and walked out the door.

Two hours later

Emily

"So...bored." I groaned for the hundredth time.

I face planted into the pillow on my bed. A familiar voice sounded amused behind me.

"Sorry for theâ€¦Somewhat lopsided accident."

"Thomas!"

I sprang up, running to the door. I skidded to a stop uncertainly. I was quite good friends with Lasky, but I didn't know if he want me to hug him. He looked surprised.

"What are you waiting for?"

I grinned and wrapped my arms around him. He smelt like cinnamon and ginger, strange. The Commander was soft and warm, not hard like John. I stepped back.

"It's okay. Have you come to relieve my boredom?"

"That wasn't my first intentâ€¦But I suppose I could, I'm off duty for three hours. I'd enjoy spending some time with you."

"Thank you. Where are my friends by the way?"

"Oh, John is off leading them around on a big tour." he said dismissively.

I grinned evilly.

"At least they don't get any fun."

Lasky smiled, but it faded quickly.

"Emily, I came here to ask you about this strange light. I know you don't know anything about itâ€¦But I know someone who could help with that."

"Who?" I prodded for more.

"Doctor Catherine Halsey."

John

The five year old Daisy whined for the hundredth time.

"_My legs are tired!_"

I wanted to glue her mouth shut.

But I resisted. I kept walking straight ahead, letting no trace of my irritation show.

"_Daisy c'mon. Just go with it." Oliver said, annoyed._

"_I would, but daddy's already carried me, so has mum and they're both tired!" she complained._

I gritted my teeth with annoyance. My amplified hearing boosted her whining tones.

"_Will you carry me Oliver?_"

Chloe groaned.

Right. That was enough.

I halted, whipping around.

"_No. He won't. I am getting sick of your whining, I will." I snarled._

She had exhausted my patience, something rare. I leapt forward and put my hands under her arms, hoisting Daisy over my shoulder. I turned and continued my angry, long strides.

"_Whee! Dad! Look!" she yelled._

I breathed in sharply. Yelling next to me was one thing, but right next to my ear was another. I halted on the smooth metal floor, Chloe walking to the side and around in front of me, continuing her walk. She was annoyed too. I took a deep breath and waited for Daisy's parents to intervene. Thankfully they did, Samuel remembering my excellent hearing from when they arrived.

"_Daisy, shush. Remember when you yelled at him before? His poor ears." Samuel chastised. I continued my quick, angry march. I heard whispering behind me and I, of course, heard them perfectly. The family had seemed to doubt my hearing._

"_Oliver, I don't want you going near him. He's too unstable, dangerous. You know that the Spartan IIs wereâ€|umâ€|."_

He lowered his voice more. It didn't serve any purpose; I waited patiently for what I knew was going to happen next.

"_Slightly sociopathic."_

I silently fumed. I was sick of all this talk. I was a human too, wasn't I? Why can't people ever see the big picture, not judge by the little one? Oliver exclaimed angrily.

"_Dad! He's not that bad and he's my friend! Emily likes him too!"_

"_Do as your father says, Oliver." Rose threatened._

Daisy didn't say anything, she probably didn't hear. She saw them talking though. She whispered in my ear.

"_What are they saying?"_

"_You wouldn't understand." I replied angrily._

"_No, really. Tell me."_

"_They are calling me crazy, dangerousâ€|.unstable. And I know I may seem like it but I am not."_

Daisy stayed silent. I could sense her dismay, though.

"_Just stay away Oliver. Stay with Emily. She'll keep you safe."_

_I finally broke, halting suddenly. I heard their scraping footsteps

on the metal floor as they slid to a stop. I whirled around, setting down Daisy. She sensed my anger and stepped back.__

"_I am not unstable. I am sane. I do not believe I am to blame for my personality. I cannot help that I killed, murdered, massacred for more than half my life. I apologize if you dislike me. But I will not put up with this. Do you know how hard it is, even _without_ you, exposing the point, to be so different?"_

_Even though I was angry, I said my words calmly. The quietness of them spoke volumes. Quiet meant angry. Dangerous. I whirled around, continuing my march back to Emily's medroom.__

_The family said nothing more.__

Emily

"She made the Spartan II'sâ€|. Halsey, didn't she? I didn't even know she was on the Infinityâ€|..In the Halo games, the storyline seems different. John isn't even on the Infinity!"

"Yes, she is on the Infinity, but in the high level security cells. As for the storylineâ€|..Well I don't know. Maybe the reality is different? As for Catherineâ€|.only I am permitted to go in or out, but I would be willing to go in with you."

"But how will we get her to tell us anything? She's pretty much a female Einstein."

"Catherine likes to bargain. She will trade information for information. She's also stubborn, like you. If we keep your mystique, we can use it against her. She'll want to know who you are. Then, we've got her."

I grinned.

"We are evil, plotting like this."

Lasky's brown eyes squinted evilly.

"Agreed? We have to hurry, I've only got two hours left."

"Agreed. Lets go!"

Ten minutes later

Emily

Commander Thomas Lasky halted at the checkpoint, a marine in that dumb ceramic armour stopping him.

"State your business. You are attempting to enter a restricted area."

Thomas's eyes flashed with annoyance.

"Don't be a silly duck; can't you see I'm the Commander?"

"Oâ€|of course sir. Go right in."

He turned and pressed a something behind him, the heavy metal door sliding quietly across. Lasky strode in, and I followed. He walked down a long, bleak corridor. Blue light crossed the entrances to cells, which only held a metal slab. It was probably where I was put when I first came here. I laughed inwardly when I thought of how silly it would be to put a child in here. Thomas halted suddenly and I almost smacked into him. He turned and regarded me with a raised eyebrow. I scowled at him and he turned back to the hard light covering the cell entry.

"Doctor Catherine Halsey. I've brought someone to talk to you."

The marine standing guard deactivated the barrier and Lasky strode in. The imposing sounding Catherine was really little more than an old woman. Grey hair and for some reason, grey eyes. A grey eyebrow was raised when I entered. She wasn't kind looking like my granny.

"A child, Lasky? You've become more delusional than ever."

Thomas's personality changed completely.

"You should be more interested in someone so close to Master Chief Petty Officer John-117. He was your favourite, correct?"

Catherine got up, turning her back on Lasky. She looked out the window in the wall, at the numerous stars.

"I suppose you could say that. But why would a _child_ be interested in me? And more importantlyâ€¦..Why would John be interested in a child?" Halsey scoffed, with a soft American accent.

I tossed my head imperiously.

"Yep. That's right. He's my friend. And more importantly, I'm here to ask you about lights that transport you through space and time."

She turned back to me, an eyebrow raised.

"What planet are you from? A dirty, scummy, slummy one I suppose?"

"First, you tell me what I want to know. Then I'll tell you where I'm from."

Catherine smiled slyly.

"I see."

John

She's not here!" exclaimed Chloe.

Oliver snorted.

"_That's pretty obvious._"

_I ignored the bickering children, instead spotting a note left on the pillow. I strode over, plucking it from its resting place. I opened the white paper carefully, noting how neatly it was folded.

Lasky's work, he had a habit of doing that. I recognized Thomas's hurried scrawl._

Gone to high level security. Asking Doctor Catherine Halsey about the light. Left half an hour ago, if you came back on time. Tell Sarah if you can that I may be late back on duty. Do not come and get me.

_-Lasky and Emily. _

I thought for a moment. Yes, it was logical to ask Halseyâ€¦.But she would, of course have a plan up her sleeve, I knew her too well. She was too intelligent to not create some kind of trap for Emily and Thomas. I would have to make sure they were alright afterwards.

"_So what are we going to do?" asked Rose._

"_Nothing." said a voice from behind me._

I whirled around, hearing the unmistakable click of a gun safety being turned off. I was too slow this time, the pistol already pointing at me. I studied the man holding it carefully. He had blonde hair and brown eyes, and he seemed uncertain if he was to shoot me or not. He was a Spartan IV; I could tell by the way he was standing in a trained posture. I looked into his eyes, telling him that I could, and would, kill him if he gave me a chance. Oliver hid behind my legs and Chloe backed away slowly, Rose and Samuel put their hands up, shoving Daisy behind them. I didn't move an inch. The Spartan shrugged. He lifted his hand, signalling, and two more appeared, deactivating their camouflage.

"_Dis-arm yourself." he commanded._

I regarded the situation with contempt. He was only a Petty Officer First Class. I outranked him by two. I did as I was told, though. He could hurt the children. I pulled out my pistol, barrel down and tossed it at his feet, doing the same with my knife. I continued to fix him with an icy stare, unnerving him.

"_Stick them all with the sedative. Give Chief a particularly large dose. I'm sick of him glaring at me."_

One Spartan moved to inject the children and adults, producing a large needle. One moved toward me as well. I switched my glare onto him. He flinched back instinctively, his green eyes wary. I felt like trying to attack them. But the leader still had his pistol trained on me. I wasn't afraid of dying, but I knew that if we were captured I would be our only chance of escaping. I let the IV move closer and he quickly stuck the needle in my arm. I instantly felt woozy and I collapsed onto my knees. I was asleep before I hit the floor. The last thing I thought was

"_Traitors."_

At the same time

Emily

I raised an eyebrow.

"What do you want then?" I asked.

Catherine smiled slyly.

"I already have what I want."

The hard light barrier behind us deactivated and two marines marched in, clipping light cuffs onto Lasky's wrists. They hummed quietly, and the marines restrained Thomas, restricting his movements as he frantically tried to free himself.

"What? Hey! Stand down! Why won't you listen? What's wrong with you?"

"Nothing is. They are just under my control." bragged Halsey.

She pulled a remote out of her pocket, waving it at us. I glanced at the marines and noticed they had a black box on their neck. Probably mind control. I finally managed to recover from my shock, realising my hands were not cuffed.

"Run!" Lasky cried.

"Get Sarah!"

I did as I was bid, dodging under the marine's armoured arms, and hurling myself out the entrance. I charged headlong down the corridor, ignoring the marines, the Spartans, and I lost myself finally in the twists and turns of the Infinity. I padded quietly along a corridor, the metal walls rough and grey. I heard a soft "Thunk" from behind me and I froze, ducking into a corner.

"Emily. It's me." Sarah Palmer's voice whispered from the spot where the noise had come from. I ran out, halting in front of her. She didn't have her armour on, only her thick black undersuit.

"What the hell has happened?" she exclaimed.

"Doctor Halseyâ€¦.She had some kind of mind control. Don't know. She got Laskyâ€¦."

She slapped a palm on her forehead. I regarded the movement, amused. Sarah "Palmer". I shook myself from my thoughts. Keep on track. On the situation.

"John? Kelly? Fred? Linda?" I asked her.

"Roland is still active. He says they are under her control, too, the little bastard. Roland is hiding though, Catherine is chasing him all over the ship with her own A.I. Don't know how she got It." she growled.

I groaned quietly. Roland, the ship's A.I., was our greatest asset. I recalled what Roland's hologram looked like, a WWII RAF pilot.

"What are we gonna do? We can't exactly rescue them! Probably half the ships seventeen thousand crew is under Halsey's control." I noted.

"Well, then think! I may be a Spartan IV, but I'm no super intelligent II!"

I racked my brain. No. No, no and still NO! Wait! Hang on!

"We could pretend to be under her control, get close to someone, and get rid of those black boxes she's controlling them with."

"It could work. But remember, the sheer amount of them would notice and Wham! You have a black box slapped onto you."

"On the other hand, we could just find Halsey, pretend to be controlled, get close to her, and get the remote she has in her pocket, and beat the crap out of anyone who tries to stop us."

"That's better. I feel like a good scrap. Let's do it." she grinned.

Twenty minutes later

Emily

I walked dumbly along, copying the marine in front of me. There was a long chain heading to a doorway, which I was pretty sure where Halsey was. I thought she would be checking on all her minions, checking to see if they were fit and properly mindless. I heard Sarah shuffling along behind me. We drew closer and closer still to the entrance. All of a sudden, the marine in front of me strode quietly inside, and I froze. One at a time, they went. I checked that I had a dumb expression on my face. The marine emerged again, a few minutes later. I walked inside, staring blankly straight ahead. I saw Catherine out of the corner of my eye, and I looked hopefully about for my friends and John. They might be here after all. I spotted Oliver out of my right eye and I desperately resisted the urge to look at him. Catherine appeared in front of me.

"Well well. Looks like someone brought a dirty _rat_ in."

I battled the urge to slap her smirking, sly face. She pulled my collar away from my neck and she smiled.

"Should have known. Sneaky, sneaky. But you don't fool me that easy."

I ran away from her, to Oliver. I could see Chloe, Rose, Daisy and Samuel all tied up on chairs as I rounded the corner.

"Emily! You made it! But! No! Run! Get out of here!" Chloe screamed.

"Why?"

She looked behind me.

"That's why."

I whirled around to find Sarah pinned to the ground by John. I saw the black box on his neck and I gasped. I could not remove that. He would kill me, and he wouldn't even know it. He fastened his hand

around Palmer's throat and she thrashed, trying to throw him off. It didn't work and John simply squeezed harder. She fell still. He straightened, stepping over Palmer. I didn't know if she was dead, or simply unconscious. His head turned and his gaze fixed on me. His face was completely blank, not even his eyes had that coldness, that incredible amount of intelligence. Catherine flicked her hand at me, turning back to a display behind her.

"Kill her."

John strode towards me without hesitation and I backed away, into the wall. I slid down it, watching the formidable Spartan. He towered over me, reaching down, probably to break my neck. My friends screamed. I stayed calm. Maybe, just maybe, I could break through that control on his mind.

"Johnâ€¦.Stop. Please. You don't want to kill me, I'm your friend. Emily, remember?"

He blinked, confused. But he continued, his hand retreating and reaching for the pistol at his hip. He whipped it out. But I ignored the fact. I knew that if he killed me, he would kill my friends. I stood slowly, raising my hands, looking straight into the barrel. I reached out slowly, closing my eyes. I touched the handle of the gun, and I slid my hand up, fastening it around John's hand. The muscles stiffened, and I shrunk back. But the shot didn't come. I looked up and opened my eyes. I stared straight into John's, blank eyes. He was cocking his head to the side, curious. His pupils narrowed and I realised he was fighting a battle. A mental battle. The black box at his neck sparked a little, and Catherine whirled around.

"What? How!"

John didn't react, even though she pressed buttons on her remote frantically.

"It's okay, John. Let go of the gun. You don't want to kill me."

His pupils recovered back to their usual size.

"You are correct. I do not want to kill you." He stuttered out.

The black box simply exploded as he managed to choke out the sentence. Halsey screamed.

"NO! Noâ€¦nonono! How!"

John whipped around. I hid behind him, looking out.

"I still have your Spartans, John."

Kelly-087, Frederic-104 and Linda-058 slipped stealthily out from the shadows caused by the roof. They had probably been there the whole time, and I hadn't seen them.

John

I watched my squadmates carefully, circling around them. Their eyes were blank, and they showed no sign that they recognised me. I was simply a target, an objective.

"_As much as I hate to pit my own Spartans against each otherâ€¦!"
Halsey sighed, her regret true._

_She pressed a button on her remote and Kelly leapt toward me, like lightning. She was fast, faster than me. However, we were both Spartans so she seemed to move in slow motion, my enhancements causing me to process everything quickly. I dodged nimbly to the side, and as soon as I had done so, Kelly was already facing me. I whirled around in time to stop her punch, deflecting it with my arm. I felt a dull ache in my arm as my metal coated bones put up with the force. Kelly's strategies didn't seem to be present, in that mindless state as she was; she took me head on in an all-out strength fight. I was a lot stronger, but Kelly was quicker. She slipped, momentarily losing her balance. I took advantage and leapt forward, catlike. I delivered a solid blow to her head and she slumped to the ground, unconscious. I turned back to Halsey. I was barely puffed. Catherine pressed the button again and Fred charged at me. This would be a lot harder. Fred was slightly stronger, but I was faster. I gasped as his fist drove into my stomach. I couldn't dodge that one; he would simply kick my legs out from under me if I did. I retaliated, slamming my fist into his ribs. He staggered back, and I leapt forward, knocking him out with a solid punch to his head. He fell backwards, limply. The fight could have gone on for ages, but Fred was dumb, and numb in his state. The black box on his neck disintegrated. _Now_ I was tired. Moving that fast put strain on my body, and having reflexes so fast needed a lot of energy. I braced myself for my next opponent, Linda. I would win easily. She didn't seem to be armed. I was, but I didn't want to shoot my squadmates. I inhaled, surprised, as I dodged her first punch, but she drew a long electrified pole from her pocket, extending it. Linda poked it into my ribs and I felt my brain shut down. I slid to the floor. I finally gave up the struggle for consciousness._

Emily

I winced as John slid to the ground. I was on my own now. My friends were tied up, Palmer was unconscious and I had no idea where Lasky was. I ran past Linda, before Halsey could give her orders. I ran towards the old woman, grabbing for the remote. I was _angry_, and it felt good. She blocked me with her arm, and I kicked her shins. She retaliated, before I could react, slamming a fist into my head. I saw stars, and I staggered backwards.

"Emily!" cried a familiar voice.

I tried to think of who it was, through my hazy thoughts. I saw a familiar shape, wearing a coat with large lapels and shiny buttons. I shook myself. My mind cleared and I saw Lasky, struggling with Catherine. Thomas was military trained, and intelligent, a tactical genius. But he wasn't prepared for the six foot Spartan charging at him. Linda-058 slammed her fist into his side, and I could hear his ribs snap from across the room. He cried out, a terrible shout of pain. Lasky flew at least six meters, slamming into the wall on the other side of the room. He slid, slowly to the ground. He didn't move, didn't make a sound. My eyes began to well up with tears. He was probably dead, that impact would have shattered his ribs, and possibly ruptured his organs. Linda whirled around, facing me. I retreated, knowing that I was defeated. I felt a big tear roll down my cheek. I would die, killed unknowingly by my friend. I decided I

would face my death with dignity. Better to die bravely than die a blubbering, cowering idiot. I probably should try to remove the black box. I leapt forward, reaching, grabbing. Linda's hand shot out, and before I had even processed this, it was on my throat, choking me, stopping me. But in her dumb state, she seemed to forget that I had arms, so I reached out, towards the box on her neck. The edges of my vision turned black, and I felt my mind relax strangely. It would be so good, just to fall asleepâ€¦to let it all go. Noâ€¦NO! Not yet! I grabbed the box weakly, pulling it with all my strength. It came loose, and I felt the hand slacken. It released me completely, and I fell to the floor gasping. I heard a muted Thump! and I realised that Linda had collapsed beside me. I stood slowly, my eyesight restoring itself. My knees wobbled uncertainly and I became aware of my friends cheering.

"Go get her Em!"

"Yeah! Kick butt!"

I looked about, for Catherine, and spotted her, her mouth dropped open in shock.

"Howâ€¦Youâ€¦What?"

I looked down at Linda. She probably had a brain overload or something, I didn't _care_, I was _angry_, she had taken my friends prisoner, probably killed Lasky, and her plan had probably killed Sarah too, she hadn't moved. I ran, full pelt, with my fury lending my muscles strength. I hit her like a cannonball, tackling her. The remote flew from her hand, and I caught it. I stood, placing it on the floor. I raised my foot.

And I crushed it.

"Don't you _ever_ _hurt_ my friends!" I screamed.

I ranted and screeched, didn't care what I was yelling at the figure on the floor, didn't care! Except something broke through my haze of thoughts. A moan, a painful, horrible one. I shut my mouth, turning to look to where I knew Lasky had landed. His brown eyes were screwed shut, his fists white. I gasped in surprise and scrambled over, kneeling at his side. I reached out and touched his side, gently. I winced as I could feel the outline of the bone through his coat. He looked up at me, his eyes strangely calm. I collapsed, crying, onto him, hugging him.

"Pleaseâ€¦..Noâ€¦." I whispered.

I could feel him trying to reply, willing his rapidly failing body to speak.

"Dâ€¦.Dooâ€¦N't... â€¦Yoâ€¦urâ€¦selfâ€¦" he gasped out.

I squeezed my eyes shut, feeling everything melt away. I couldn't see anything, hear anything. I was vaguely aware of the passage of time, hours maybe. Days. I didn't know. All I knew was warmthâ€¦A shifting feeling, then nothing.

Four days later

John

_I sat vigil next to her bed, as usual. Watching. Waiting. Nothing. I felt disappointed. Emily had been in a shocked coma for four days. I had woken up just as the doctors had arrived. They had watched the security camera footage when the remote had been destroyed, viewing it live through the screen. They had rushed to the room, finding Emily slumped over a dying Thomas. And thank god she had. Her weight had compressed a source of internal bleeding, essentially saving the Commander's life. He was still recovering, but he was awake and alert. His ribs were shattered, but they were healing nicely. Every day, he pestered me to give him updates, but every time, it was a simple _

"_Nothing." I said out loud._

The one word, so simple, triggered a shift from the still child lying slack on the bed's crisp white sheets.

"_Meerrpfâ€|Laskyâ€|.Halseyâ€|.Remoteâ€|.Have toâ€|erâ€|.Arâ€|.Ar." she mumbled._

Her blue eyes opened slowly. They seemed confused, but they fixed on my face and they glowed with recognition.

"_Johnâ€|. ? What the heck happened?" she asked slowly, as if she was making sure she was still alive._

"_It's over. Halsey has been put in isolation on a prison planet."_

"_Thomasâ€|.Is heâ€|.isâ€|" she asked suggestively. _

I nodded once.

"_I wanna see him. Now!" she demanded._

"_He is resting, asleep. He needs it." I lied._

Emily scowled at me, as if she knew I was.

"_When?"_

_I let myself smile slightly. _

"_Don't you grin at me!"_

One Day Later

Emily

I walked uncertainly down the hospital corridor, testing to make sure my legs were still working. John held me up slightly. I wanted to see Lasky, wanted to see my friends, wanted to go home. Home, I thought, was a long way away. I missed my warm bed, my books, my computer games, but most of all, I missed the safety. John pulled my arm slightly, signalling to another medroom. I followed him inside. I saw Thomas, propped up with pillows, his eyes bright. I grinned.

"Hey, Emily. Are you alright?" he asked.

I ran over to the side of his bed.

"Yeah! You? You look like your about to fall apart."

"I'll recover. I hope that remark wasn't anything to do with my age!"

John coughed from outside the door, but I knew he was hiding a slight snigger.

"Oh shutup you!"

I heard an unintelligible sound and I put it down as laughter.

"I hope Sarah is alright?"

"Yeah, she's okay. She's bossing everyone around while you're hurt. I think she's enjoying it too."

Lasky seemed satisfied. He sat back.

"Now there's the problem of your friends."

I frowned.

"Eh?"

"John tells me Chloe, Oliver, and Daisy are trashing the place. I was wondering if you could possiblyâ€¦stop them?"

I grinned wolfishly.

"I think I should join them, this time, scaling it up a notch. I think I'll go toilet paper all your dropships."

Lasky smiled. I gave him a big hug.

"You saved my life."

I frowned once again.

"How?"

"When you collapsed on me, you cut off internal bleeding. You saved me. Thank you."

I stepped back.

"I don't want any awardsâ€¦"

"I wasn't planning to give you any. I think the greatest reward for you is the fact that I think you are a hero. Thank you." he said once again.

"Thanks. Umâ€¦How am I going to get back to my world? I don't mean offenseâ€¦but I miss it."

"Luckily, that's already solved. The light is waiting for you, right

now. This time, it's calling. It's saying something."

"What?"

"Emily."

Three days later

Emily

I sat on my bed, thinking. I had no idea what was happening to my life, but I knew it was a miracle. Saying goodbye had been the hardest thing, knowing that I mightn't ever come back, ever see them again. But eventually, I knew, all good things do come to an end. You just need to learn to embrace the fact and live in harmony with it.

5. The Fifth Fanfic (sequel)

I chomped down on my delicious, juicy chicken drumstick, the television behind me blaring out the news. I shifted on my stool, dropping the dissected drumstick onto my plate and picking up my fork, stabbing my carrots and scoffing them. I finished my potato and sat back, burping.

"Thanks mum." I said over my shoulder at the two figures sitting on couches in front of the telly. I jumped off my stool, running down the tiled white hallway to my room. I opened my sliding cupboard door and got out my pyjamas, I marched halfway down the hallway, turning to my left and opening the bathroom door, and I undressed quickly, shivering.

Brrâ€|this is freezing! I wish I was back in John's world with temperature controlled stuff. I thought bitterly, but I have no idea when I'll get to see John or his world againâ€|

How I wished to go back there! Even though going through the light was dangerous, where I ended up and what I did was funâ€|in that scary, adrenaline way.

I shoved all thoughts aside. This can be done later, when I'm not standing here naked, freezing my undevelo- actually, let's not go there.

I turned the shower onto hot and jumped in.

Twenty minutes later

Emily

"Get that attack boat!" demanded my father.

I sighed. I was flying an attack jet in Battlefield 4 - on the map Paracel Storm, an ocean map set around a bunch of islands. My intended target was a large boat with a big gun and other dangerous weaponry. It could probably have missiles for all I knew, so I moved the mouse, rolling my jet to the right and lowering the nose, diving. I lined up the unsuspecting boat, firing the thirty millimetre

cannon. The hit register came up on the screen. Twenty damage. Thirty, forty, fifty- Then I heard a metallic tinging sound and my jet blew up. The kill register came up on the side of the screen:

RG_Patty[99K Tunguska M]MrSquizzie

My father sighed.

"If you can't kill anything, we aren't getting the jet."

Annoyance flashed through my mind. It wasn't MY fault the AA was right there! HE told me to kill that bloody boat! Not my fault that he was the one who had no clue how hard it was to fly a jet! I stormed out of the room, fuming. I marched up the hallway to my room and slammed the door, the sound echoing. I threw myself onto my floor and stayed there, I didn't know how long and I didn't particularly care. My thoughts were thunderous and angry, but soon I became aware of a humming noise and I sat up slowly, coming face to face with the light. Yes, "The" Light. I tried to scramble backwards but found I couldn't. The orb seemed to hold me in place, and I could do nothing but stare into its depths. It bobbed, and I felt myself getting pulled in.

John

I sat down on the chair, listening carefully for any squeaking, potentially meaning it would collapse. I might not be in armour but I still weighed around one hundred and thirty kilograms. Lasky sat on the other side of a desk, on an identical chair. The room was small and stuffy, with grey metal walls. There weren't any windows, but it didn't bother me - I am not a claustrophobe.

"_This is about that light that keeps appearing at its whim and taking you and Emily with it. Who knows when it will take someone else? We don't even know if it's dangerous. I'm asking you, tell me everything you know."_

"_Sir, I am sorry. I don't have much to tell."_

"_We have scientistsâ€|.but they are stumped. They have no idea what this "thing" is."_

_Lasky sighed. I tried to hold some sympathy, this was troubling Thomas more than anything ever had. As always, I couldn't seem to conjure up the feeling. _

"_Dismissed." _

_Lasky turned away, holding his head in his hands. I got up, opening the door carefully. I strode out and closed it behind me, marching down the corridor. I walked automatically, leaving my head clear for thought. Why was this so heavy on Lasky's conscience? I don't understandâ€|.this should not disturb him. I sighed, I missed Emily, and I hadn't thanked her for saving me from Halsey. I added that onto my mental to do list and then I realised I had walked to the cargo bay where Emily first appeared. I halted, was this what Emily had talked about one time? "Fate" she called it. I strode inside, staring around; I could see tiny bits of dirt and dust on the metal around me; no one had been in here for a while. I blinked, wanting to

protect my delicate enhanced eyes from the dust. I sat down on an old ammo crate, reaching into the pocket of my black pants and pulling out a pencil, which I shoved into my mouth and chewed. Ugh this tasted horrible. It helped me think; strangely, it seemed to do the trick for Emily too. I sighed and closed my eyes. Sometimes not having emotionsâ€¦sucked. I used Emily's expression, hoping to amuse myself. It didn't do anything, and I sat there for a long time, closing my eyes and chewing on my pencil, until I heard a loud humming noise and I opened my eyes to look. _

The light was floating a few inches away from my face, and as I blinked, it chimed, clear and loud like a bell. I stared at it, cocking my head to the side. This thing was strange, I wanted to know more about it, but I had never got the chance. It usually just sucked me straight in, no questions asked. It seemed to shimmer, here but not here, it was almost transparent, and I studied it carefully, reaching out a hand. It instantly floated out of reach. The orb thing bobbed up and down and I felt I strange tug on my mind, it was calling me, and for some reason I wanted to go. I stood and walked forward and the orb dropped lower obediently. I tried to stop myself, it wasn't me that wanted to walk into the light.

Emily

Damn you! I dug my heels into the carpet and tried to stop, but the light had a relentless pull. I was lifted up, and I had no points of contact to the carpet. I flew forward head first into that bloody _thing_ that kept stalking me. I couldn't see, the light was blinding, and I could tell I was still hurtling forward. I closed my eyes and waited, but the light didn't dissipate. I felt myself stop, and I detected a presence, strong. I seemed to be detached, spirit like, it felt like I had a body but it just wasn't there. Just for a moment, I thought I could smell John- a strange, metallic and a strangely sweet smell. Then I felt something against my hand. I couldn't grab it, it was too big and I felt muscle under my fingers.

John

I felt a small thought process, I didn't know how I knew that, but it was confused and a little scared. My mind seemed to roam about, I could still feel my body but my thoughts seemed free. My body detected a small touch in between its shoulder blades, but I couldn't seem to move. I wanted to recoil away, an instinct drilled into me, so I willed myself to somehow, just somehow, interact. I felt my thoughts roam, searching, finding their target. I couldn't seem to enter whatever- or whoever's- head I think I was attempting to intrude on.

Emily

I felt a small pain in my mind, like someone was sticking a pin into my conscience. I quickly began to puzzle out what it was. With a flash I remembered the Eragon books, the sensation Eragon had when his mind was being probed. I thought that if something was trying to probe my mind it wasn't exactly friendly. I tried to block everything out, instead thinking of a brick wall. The presence retracted, but the skin on my hand which had touched the muscular 'thing' felt like water and I felt it go _through _the flesh. My mind returned to a bodyâ€¦but I didn't think it was mine. I knew I was being sucked in,

and then everything went black.

John

_The world spun and I was chucked out onto the cargo bar floor. What? Nothing happened, I didn't go anywhere. I stood slowly. What had happened? Was the lightâ€¦Broken? I felt like I wasn't aloneâ€¦there was _something_ somewhere; I listened carefully, but I could hear nothing but the distant hum of the Infinity's engines. Then I heard the whisper inside my head and I flinched, startled._

_Where am I? What the _HECK_ happened? It said nervously. _

It was Emily? She was inside my head?

John? What the HECK!? Emily's thoughts scrambled into a corner of my conscience. I thought I could probably replyâ€¦I thought, hard.

_You're inside my head, Emily. Weâ€¦we merged. _

_Wow this is coooooool! But also scary. I can'tâ€¦I can feel your body but I can't do anythingâ€¦it's like I'm floating around inside your head, Emily said anxiously. _

_I felt a sudden urge to tap my foot and I realised _Emily_ had told my body to do that, without realising. Tapping her foot was a thing she did, a habit. I forced myself not to. _

Emily, you are scrambling me up. You are telling me to do things I don't want to do. You're controlling my body, I thought to her, irritated. I tried to walk forwards, wanting to test how this strange new connection would affect me, but instantly I felt Emily's input and I tangled myself up in my own feet, and I tripped, for the first time in years, falling flat on my face.

Her dismembered laughter echoed around inside my head.

John, I don't know how to stop myselfâ€¦I want my body back! I don't like this one! She whined and I groaned out loud. Now I had an Emily inside_ my head I couldn't get rid of her. _

Emily

I, of course didn't tell John that his body felt _amazing_. I resisted the urge to use it, it was so amazingly strong and fast, and I could even see what he was seeing, his vision as sharp as an eagle's, crisp, clear and perfect. I could hear John's thoughts as voices and could see flashes of memories, too quick to discern. I wanted to blink but I didn't, as that could scramble John.

Tee hee, I'm like a Cortana, I giggled. Cortana could slot into his armour which connected her to his brain and allowed her to communicate.

I heard one of John's thoughts sigh quietly,

Although, you are more annoying than Cortana.

I mentally told him to shut up, and he strode forward, out of the cargo bay. I had the most ridiculous urge to take smaller steps and swagger about, sometimes how I walked when I wanted to show off, it was a habit and instantly, I was in control; John was walking like Lady Gaga and taking small, dainty steps. I laughed, lucky no one was in this deserted hallway or they would have wondered WHAT THE HECK was going on. I felt John desperately stop himself from laughing like I was.

Emily, I felt John grow tired and he almost fell asleep, and I realised that this was straining his brain, somehow. I guess the only reason he hadn't simply died from the strain was that his brain was super intelligent and big and had heaps of room and stuff. I instantly withdrew, into a corner of his conscience and stayed there, blind and de-tached. I didn't know how I could do these things, I just _knew._

I was so happy to finally see John again; it had been a month since I left his world. I felt John open a door and I sensed his feeling of safety and I realised that he was in his room. I rushed into his head again as he sat down on his desk chair.

So what are we gonna do? I'm stuck inside your head, we don't know how I got there, I keep scrambling up whatever you do and apparently I am annoying, I thought to him.

I don't know, he thought back. This is not my region of expertise, we could tell-

NO! You can't tell anyone! This is something special, I know it. I don't know why, it just is, I interrupted.

John pondered this for a moment.

I think it's unreasonable that you would think of this that way. Lasky is very troubled by this and he gave me orders to tell him everything I know; It's against a lot of my rules to ignore orders, and I do realise that I don't always obey them but this is different, he thought to me, his familiar, deep, calm voice calming me down. He didn't seem fazed by the situation, just slightly confused and a little miffed.

Please, John. I have this reaaaally bad feeling that we shouldn't let this slip. This might sound weird coming from a twelve year old but I think that there are greater forces at play here, and that there is a reason for all this. And don't give me all that "But we don't know that" stuff and just listen, I thought, trying to get him to understand. I had this feeling deep in my gut and it _demanded_ that I listen to it. I concentrated on John's body, seeing through his eyes and hearing what he could, but this time I think I went too far, I felt John's conscience shoved out of control of his body. I blinked, confused, but when I realised what I'd done I gulped nervously; well, my host's body did anyway. John's conscience hammered me relentlessly.

What did you do? He thought to me nervously, the first time I'd ever heard that note in his voice.

I...I don't know! I flashed back. When I wanted to see and hear what you could it just shoved you out of your own body!

I instinctually tried to stand and John's body reacted so quickly the desk chair toppled and I tripped over it. Strangely, I didn't seem to feel much pain when I landed on my back and I realised that it was still essentially John's body, but a differentâ€¦.well, soul. I didn't think like John, I was literally an Emily who was him. I could sense John's thoughts restlessly discerning ways to get out of this. I could almost imagine him stalking around back there, his bright blue eyes narrowed and concentrating.

This is bad. You can't go around as _me_, he thought angrily.

Why not? I asked.

He was silent for a moment.

You will be different, you will stuff up, and you are most certainly _not_ able to use my body properly; I don't think Thomas will approve of you-I mean- me, smashing things, he thought, irritated.

I began to get nervous and I wanted to chew my nails, another habit, but this time I forgot; John's body responded by smashing its fingers into its teeth. Hard. I felt I momentary flash of pain then nothing. John's consciousness grew slightly amused at my terrible use of his body.

Someone doesn't know how to drive, he said.

Oh shut up you smart ass, I shot back.

His amusement grew. He was annoying me, but at least he was having some fun out of this, the poor guy probably felt so lost back there. The moment didn't last.

Emily, we need to solve this. We cannot have you walking around as me.

Well, you give me ideas then! I can't do everything!

Then there was a dreaded knock on the door and John grew silent.

John! Help me! I thought nervously.

Remember how I act. How I react. You'll be fine, just concentrate, said his calm voice.

I stood slowly, controlling John's body carefully, and walked across the small grey metal room and opened the door carefully. I tried to make sure no trace of emotions was in John's eyes.

As I opened the door, I was met by a barrage of sound, the sheer quality and range of John's hearing was incredible. I could hear the electrical currents flowing through the lights, humming softly. The person standing at the door was Lasky, and I felt a surge of fear. Lasky knew John on a personal level and he would pick up on the tiniest difference.

It's okay, Emily. Stay calm, don't worry, I'll help you, John's voice said in the back of my head.

"John! I was just dropping by to ask your assistance for something; one of the warthogsâ€¦.has a problem. Its upside down and there are not enough Spartan IV's around to lift it." Thomas announced, rather sheepishly. "A Spartan IV got it like that in the first place," he added.

I gulped nervously.

"Iâ€¦Of course sir. Right away sir." John's voice unusual and alien to me.

Oh no I messed that up! John only ever talks so much with me! Lasky, however, just seemed relieved.

"The 'hog is at platform A. I'll trust you'll be there soon."

"Yes, sir."

I sighed with relief, after Lasky had turned and strode away down the busy corridor packed with people.

Errm, John? How the HECK DO I get to platform A? I asked the presence in the back of my head.

He gave me a complicated mess of directions.

Sorry, Emily. My sense of direction is horrible. I can't actually control my head to see where we are and I cannot get us there myself, he said only with a _trace_ of jeering in his voice.

It was a jibe at my mess I had set up, and I mentally growled at him. I was suddenly met by a vision of him staring at me with smugness in his blue eyes, eyebrows raised, one corner of his lips twitched _ever so slightly_ upwards. I started with surprise and missed a step, stumbling as I had begun to piece together John's directions while I made John's body walk. John had sent me an image, like a thought hologram or something. I didn't know. I was slightly annoyed at his smart ass look, however.

So it worked, then, he said.

How did you do that? What is it? I stopped John's body as I was walking and slid down into a dark, rank side corridor for privacy, John's delicate eyes itching at the dust in the air.

I think it's a representation of my disembodied self, my _thoughts_ are changed into an image, he said, that trace of mockery in his mental voice as he jibed again at my mistake.

Oh very good, very good. Clap clap, I appraised him sarcastically, Now you can annoy me in person.

The image seemed to move to the corner of my mind, so now I could concentrate, but I could still see him, pacing now, his blue eyes unfocused and his muscles tense.

Twenty minutes later

John

_The boredom was killing me. Nothing to do but observe and both Emily and I knew that was not what I was supposed to be doing. I didn't have a body, I couldn't feel safe, I felt vulnerable and I had only Emily stumbling around like a fool in my own. She still hadn't quite got the hang of it. I observed quietly through her thoughts, as she made slow progress to the A platform. She rounded the corner, and there was the warthog, turned upside down and a group of marines and Lasky surrounding it. Thomas looked up at John, well, what he thought was John, anyway, I thought wryly. _

"_Chief! You made it! Well, as you can see for yourself, we're in quite a pickle." A sergeant said, his American accent strong._

_Emily controlled my body very carefully and stiffly over to the warthog. I admired her concentration and care as she grabbed the wheel hub. I heard her thoughts flash by, worried, anxious and scared. She lifted the military truck easily, rolling it onto its side and over onto its wheels, the large off road tires causing the truck to bounce. The marines hollered and cheered all the way. I could feel her revelling in my body's strength, and I felt a small tinge of "Jealousy? _

"_Jeez man! Who needs those Spartan fours anyway! We got chief!" a private hollered._

"_Thanks, John. Nice to see you could find the time to help out with a little "maintenance" here and there. Dismissed," Lasky said cheerily._

_Emily turned stiffly around and marched carefully back down the corridor. _

Well, how'd I do? You think I can drive yet? She thought smugly to me.

You're already driving, I replied back. Unlicensed too, I added.

Shut UP, she flashed.

She halted suddenly as a group of ODST's crowded the hallway, blocking her path. Orbital Drop Shock Troopers, rough and tough soldiers, essentially souped up marines. A branch of the UNSC that hated Spartans unlike any other, as they had found themselves outdated by the high tech super soldiers. I watched them through Emily's thoughts, as they formed a line and a single ODST strode through the middle. I recognised the face, and I began to feel a tiny bit anxious.

_Emily "You do realise who these are, correct? _

Yeah "aren't they those soldiers Spartans replaced? ODSTs? They hate you guys.

_The leader is Odval "he hates _me _in particular. Be careful, Emily, you haven't learned how to use my body properly yet and you could get- I mean- I could get hurt, I warned her._

_What do you mean, use? she asked, but I didn't have time to reply before the black clothed Odval spoke. _

"_Well, well, well, look who we have here. The Master Chief, sulking around the hallways. Children shouldn't play by themselves" he sneered. I flashed with annoyance, and Emily's thoughts became anxious._

John! Whatâ€¦|.what do I do? She asked.

It's okay. Just walk through them, ignore them. They won't put up much of a fight.

She controlled my body, barging through the ODSTs. My body had enough force even while walking to knock a few of the angry ODST's off their feet. She was scared of their bulging biceps and their tattooed shoulders, their rough and tough looks terrifying her, even though she had my body. Emily accelerated, wanting to get this over and done with, but I heard an unmistakable "click" and I calmly told her to stop.

It's a gun, Emily. Stop.

Johnâ€¦|.I don't wanna do this! I don't wanna do this! John please! she begged, halting my body.

_Calm down. You've got yourself out of things before. _

"_You're not going anywhere, Spartan one one seven."_

Emily

I tried to pale and sweat, but John's body didn't seem to be able to do the action. I couldn't feel the terrible knotting and twisting in my gut like my own body could. I could only feel these things mentally; I had no relief from them like I would if I had a body that could carry out the feelings. John's image in the back of my head was tense, his blue eyes irritated and his thoughts swirled around back there like a traffic jam. I returned my attention to the gun and I turned around slowly, coming face to face with Odval, a pistol levelled at my head. Odval's emerald eyes were smug, knowing he had succeeded. I couldn't kill him; all the ODSTs had guns in their belts and could pull them out in a moment's notice. I thought and thought what I could do, and the only thing I could was glare at him with all the coldness and intelligence that I knew that John's eyes could produce. I saw a momentary flash of fear in Odval's slim, evil face. His thin, angled cheekbones made him look like a supervillain, and I had an instinctual hatred for his smug, superior look.

Emily, turn and go. He will not dare to shoot you-I mean, me, John's voice said in the back of my head, his tone calm and sure.

I obeyed, swivelling away from the gun and striding down the grey metal hallway, but I didn't get five meters before I heard it.

BANG!

Instantly, I felt John use all of his mental strength to override my control, and I watched, shocked as his body moved at blinding speed,

dodging the bullet and smacking the gun out of Odval's hand. Next, he whirled around, shattering the wrist of an ODS'T who had half drawn his pistol, the splinters of bone protruding from it the ODS'T screamed and fainted. I shut my connection to John's eyes, wishing I could throw up. I could still see faint flashes of blood, remnants of what he was seeing. John was courageous, there were fifteen ODS'Ts and maybe if he had his armour, he would be fine, but not like this. I felt John's consciousness weaken; forcing his way into controlling his body was draining all his energy. I felt small shocks travelling up John's wrist, and I could still hear screams, blood and groans of the dying. He was killing them, for his own sake, and the worst thing was that I didn't feel any remorse in his thoughts. Then, I knew John was gone, for once his massive physical strength not aiding him in his task. I rushed back into control, opening John's eyes and being welcomed by a scene of utter destruction. ODS'Ts lay sprawled on the ground, over hand rails, some of them in awkward, sharp and unnatural positions. Every single one was unconscious, not breathing or mortally injured. I tried to gasp with shock, but again, John's body could not perform the action. He didn't need to kill them!

I did. They would have killed _me_ in an instant, John's voice replied weakly in my head.

"What is going on here?" I heard a familiar voice say in surprise.

I whirled around to find Lasky and Sarah checking the pulse of an ODS'T. I grew disgusted at the blood on John's knuckles, the tiny splinters of bone sticking out of his shirt.

Commander Thomas Lasky

_I stood up, the ODS'T had no pulse. I knew that the ODS'Ts hated Spartans, and that was half the reason I put their quarters and training areas in separate sides of the Infinity, but I didn't know they were stupid enough to attack _the Master Chief_ of all things.

_

"_What is going on here?" I said, shocked._

_John whirled around, surprised, his knuckles and clothes bloodied, which he observed withâ€|.was that..disgust? What? John never feltâ€|disgusted, I didn't even think he had the capacity to feel it. He didn't stand like John, either, a trained military stance, he stood almost childishly, his feet close together, his body language like the child that had messed up this world so horribly. The familiar stance shocked me to the core, Emily couldn't have done this! What the heck? Sarah checked another ODS'T, quickly pronouncing him dead. She noticed the look on my face and she turned her head, her armour's servos whirring quietly. John blinked, three times in quick succession. _

"_Eâ€|Emily? Areâ€|.you?" I stuttered out._

John's face grew into an expression of shock, something I had never, ever seen. His-or possibly-her face grew tight, the icy blue eyes widening slightly. It looked very, very strange, the innocent, but guilty look on John's serious face.

Emily

Ohhh crap. Oh crap oh crap oh crap. I'd been caught.

Emilyâ€¦, John sighed.

"Emily, is that you? Pfft who am I! Of course it isn't you." Sarah scoffed, slapping her head with an armoured hand.

"Umâ€¦Noooo" I said, completely screwing up my reply, the words completely un-John. Lasky's mouth dropped, and Sarah's eyebrows rose. I dug the toe of one of John's boots into the metal floor and twisted it from side to side.

"Would you mind telling me how the heck you are John?" Sarah asked, stepping forward to squint at me closely, and I stepped back, fixing her with a glare.

"I have no bloody idea or I would have told you already!" I said, John's voice sounding funny with the sentence.

"It was the light wasn't it?" asked Thomas.

"Oh yes, well done Durlock." I said sarcastically, rolling John's impressive blue eyes.

Sarah tapped her foot, her armoured appendage making a very annoying loud thumping noise. I screwed up John's nose and raised both eyebrows, and I stood on her foot, pinning it to the ground with enough force to produce a groan from her armour. She gave me a withering look and proceeded to lift her head up proudly.

"STOP BICKERING YOU TWO!" Lasky yelled. His roar echoed off the walls in the high hallway, and hurt John's extremely sensitive ears; for the first time since I took his body, I felt actual pain. I cringed away, putting John's hands over his ears. Lasky's face looked almost sheepish.

"Sorry. Was the only way I could get you to stop." He said bashfully.

I pulled my hands away from my ears and glared. I saw John's eyes reflected in Thomas's, just as cold as ever, but with a little _me_ in them somehow.

"So if you're Johnâ€¦where is John himself?" asked Sarah, her armour reflecting the lights on the roof of the hall.

I tapped John's head.

"Still in the noggin. I'm in control, though."

You're unlicensed, don't forget. I did not give you permission to drive this vehicle, John said.

Another jibe at my mistake. Oh ho ho, John could be a real smart ass when he wanted.

Oh would you stop with that! I flashed back.

"So the lightâ€¦it switched you?" Thomas asked, rubbing his chin with one hand thoughtfully, and I winced, hearing the rasping sound

off his light stubble. Now I knew how_ extremely_ sensitive John's hearing was, I knew how John felt when I whined or did something repetitive and loud.

"Correct again, Derwood Holmes."

Lasky's face turned into one of shock, and he went pale.

"You okay?" I asked.

"Yes, yes of course" Thomas said, straightening.

"What are you going to do with me?" I said.

Hello? I am still here! he said with mock shock.

FINE!, I replied.

"Erm..I mean, us."

Again, Thomas rubbed his stubble. John's eyelid twitched as I resisted the urge to stop him.

"I don't know how to put this butâ€¦I would like to..examine you." He said sheepishly.

I saw the John in the back of my head shiver slightly, his blue eyes saying "no" completely.

"There's something John doesn't like about that idea. You know how he feels about things like this."

The image looked at me with the closest he could get to gratefulness.

"It doesn't matter. This is important, and we need to know what this light has done."

"You know what it's done! We're switched around! You don't need to do _anything!_"

"If I didn't know any better, I'd say you are hiding something."

I wasn't hiding _anything!_ What was wrong with him? He's gone all _weird_, and I felt like slapping him in the face.

It could be the shock?, John pondered.

He's not in shock you dingbat! I replied.

Sarah looked at Thomas funny, her lips tight.

"Sir I-"

She grew silent as she noticed Thomas had gone very pale, and looked sickly.

"Ummm," I stuttered.

The commander's knees wobbled and he fell unconscious to the

floor.

Two Days Later

John

The doctors had no idea what was ailing Lasky, but he couldn't stop tossing and turning, crying out. I felt helpless; all I could do was watch as Emily attempted to assist in some way, causing more trouble than good. Stumbling around in my body and tripping over things wasn't exactly helping. I feltâ€¦embarrassed, I think, that I had to be seen like that. For the hundredth time, Sarah asked one of the doctors, striding past in their long white coats.

"_Do you know what it is yet?"_

_I wished Emily would close's my body's eyes; the harsh glare off the polished white floor and metal medical equipment was beginning to give me a mental headache. _

"_No, ma'am. We have no idea what it is; he has no infections, no viruses, and no wounds. The only thing off the scale is his biological readings and his EEG._

I paid sharp attention to "biological". It sounded familiarâ€¦.so close, think, thinkâ€¦just almost thereâ€¦.

_JOHN WOULD YOU STOP _THINKING_ SO HARD?! It's very annoying and its throwing me off, Emily yelled angrily at me._

Emily, I was onto something. You completely destroyed my concentration, I replied, my tone flat. I adjusted my mental image, folding my arms and raising an eyebrow.

_Now what was it? I thought, again racking my brains, but again, Emily ruined my train of thought; standing up and pacing, drowning out my contemplations with her awful memories of music she listens to. _

I CAN'T HEAR YOOOOU! She yelled mentally.

I can't even hear myself, I sighed.

_I heard the faint sounds of boots tapping on the cool white floor through her thought trains as she paraded my body around. She stopped and turned to stand facing Lasky and Sarah. The Spartan commander stood stiffly, her white armour glinting. The red hawk symbols on her shoulders were dull and scratched, her hands clenched at fists by her sides. _

"_Stupid eggheads. As soon as we need em', they fail us." She said irritably._

Thomas shifted and muttered softly, his forehead drenched with sweat.

"_Mmmpfâ€¦Don't take mâtâ€¦.Dida..t.."_

_I started with surprise. Didact. In Emily's world, a HALO 4 villain. In my world, humanity's greatest threat. I wasn't scared, I never

was. He probably could have killed me if it wasn't for Cortana, my faithful AI who sadly "died" in Emily's computer game. She didn't in reality. _

_Thomas sat up suddenly, brown eyes wide with fear, but instantly he fell limp, prey to the torture of his dreams. It wasn't a virus or even the Didact himself. At least, I did not think it was. The only other thing would be that something-or someone, had poisoned Thomas, and I didn't think it was impossible that it didn't want to do it willingly. I hadn't seen the extent of the ancient Forerunner's power; he could have mind control for all I knew. _

Emily

I controlled John's body stiffly along the corridor.

What's all this stuff about the Didact and Forerunners and what the heck in general? I asked, John's mental image pacing.

Do you know about the Forerunners?

Yeah, aren't they like aliens that came before humans? Or something or other. Ancient, the Covenant think they are gods, pretty silly. In the HALO games the Librarian, she's some old woman isn't she? And that bad guy you were talking about, they're Forerunners, I told him, proud of my knowledge.

Correct. Before I was interrupted rudely by you earlier, I was onto something. Emily, in HALO 4, is there anything referred to as "biological?" John asked.

Well, yeah sure. When you got that ummâ€¦ Thing, off the Librarian that helped you fight the Didact or something, Cortana mentioned something about your biological thing bei-

I halted suddenly.

Waaait. You think the Didact's done something to Lasky?!

I do not think he has done it directly. Somehow, I think that he has had someone else do it, John pondered.

How, exactly, can he manipulate someone through space and time? That's impossible.

But we do not know if it is for him, he replied, and I thought I could detect a faint tinge ofâ€¦ was thatâ€¦ anxiety?

Okay. So Lasky has been supposedly poisoned by an unknown person, being controlled by a certain someone who's a Forerunner. We don't know how to help your commander, and he's probably going to die; could this get any more negative?

I felt a strange presence and I stopped.

John, what's that?

What?

Why couldn't he feel it? This heavy presence, growing stronger and

str-

The light appeared, directly in front of me, blazing more strongly than ever; the light beginning to burn out John's sensitive retinas. The pull, I could tell, was warping space and time, the hallways around me seeming to stretch a million kilometres long; making me feel sick. The light was not a transparent, gentle anomaly; it was literally a miniature sun. I flew forward, head first.

Unknown time later

I opened my eyes slowly to find cool, soft grass underneath my back and a sun in my eyes. The air smelt sweet and soft, and I sat up. To my surprise, I didn't feel that strength anymore, the world seemed dull, edges no longer sharp and crisp. I looked down at myself and found with a shock,

"I HAVE MY BODY AGAIN! YEEHA!" I hollered, jumping up. I looked about at my surroundings; I was in a clearing, woods around it. The trees were mossy and tall, the forest inside well lit and friendly looking. But I soon silenced my amazement.

There were no bird calls, no animal roars or wails; utterly silent save for the wind rustling softly through the trees. I began to feel that unmistakable knotting and tightening of my stomach, the feeling of fear, of anxiety. I had to find John. If I had my own body, he should have his.

I didn't expect to hear the voice in my head, a deep, malevolent sound, and I thought I recognised it.

Foolish Reclaimer. You interfere with the business of higher beings. I shall be thankful to correct this mistake.

I tried to shrink away from an invisible enemy; the Didact was talking to me, like he had in HALO 4, but to John instead. Somehow, he could contact me, too.

Leave..Leave me alone! I replied.

The Didact chuckled, the presence fading away. I wanted to go home! It was bad enough I was all alone, but with the Didact too? I wanted my warm bed, my books, my cat, I wanted something. I ran blindly into the forest, not noticing the sun setting. Branches whipped at my face and I twisted my ankle on a root. I fell to the ground sobbing. The forest grew dark around me. Mist started to drift through on a musty, wet breeze. I tried to stand but my ankle had swollen up and was throbbing; I cried out in pain and fell down again.

"Help me! Someone! Please!" I sobbed.

The strong one will help you, child, a kindly womanlike voice said gently inside my mind.

The Librarian? I asked her.

I received no answer. I thought she would help me, even though she was an ancient forerunner alien. I shivered, the air growing bitterly cold. Fog drifted above me and for a moment all I could see was grey, the thick moisture clogging my nose. Wisps of mist drifted out of

holes in tree trunks, evaporating. The strong one? Could she mean John? How could he know where I was? I shivered again; the cold was beginning to penetrate my bones. I felt numb, my brain slowing down. It would be so good, to just fall asleepâ€¦

NO! I shook myself awake. I wouldn't succumb. I got up, careful to not put so much weight on my ankle, and limped through the foggy wood. I eventually broke out into a starry sky, two moons present, both thin and bright, delicate crescents. There was a vast plain ahead of me, rocky and grassy. I looked around for John, or anything, be it alien or somethingâ€¦else. Then I heard the howl, just like a wolf's, echoing around behind me in the misty forest. It was close, dangerously close. I totally freaked out; wolves?! I limped faster, across the rocky moor. They were hunting me. Moonlight reflected off icy mountains in the distance, at least twenty kilometres away, the massive cloud-reaching peaks thoroughly intimidating. The sharp surfaces I couldn't avoid sliced my runners to shreds, holes in the side and top. Meanwhile, the wolves howled again, closer. I should've stayed in the forest, climbed a tree. Out here there was no cover, nowhere to hide, no vantage points.

I turned to look back at the forest, now two kilometres away. I froze with shock as I saw five wolves lope slowly out, they must have seen me silhouetted against the moonlight; they began an excited barking, rushing into attack speed. I turned and tried to run, but I stumbled and tripped, gashing my hand on a sharp rock. I swore, and sat up. I could hear the thumping of the wolves paws now, hear their panting. I scrambled under a ledge of rock and hid, shivering. The excited barking halted and I knew they were in hunting mode.

A hand clamped over my mouth, pulled me away from the ledge and lifted me upwards, against a body of solid muscle. I relaxed, turning around and hugging the Spartan gratefully. He picked me up, slinging me over his shoulder. The wolves leapt up onto the rock, and for the first time, I really saw them, lean but strong, with long legs and yellow eyes, silver grey fur and dog like muzzles. They would be beautiful if they weren't out to kill John and I.

"John, go!"

His muscles tensed and he jumped right over a wolf. I screamed as he hit the ground again, jumping off the ledge and dodging rocks with blinding speed. I couldn't see anything, but I knew John could see like it was daytime. The wolves pursued, their yellow eyes glinting in the darkness, but John still wasn't at full speed. He was waiting until there weren't any sharp rocks threatening to impale him. I shrunk into him, the dangerous tactics worrying me. A wolf barked, probably an Alpha, and the pack surged forward in their classic tactics, three wolves jumping up above and to the side as John entered a narrow defile.

"You know what they're doing, right?" I yelled above the howling wind.

"No, but I know what they have in mind." He replied, totally calm.

He used his last burst of speed, charging ahead of the wolves before they could block his path. The rough thumping as John ran rattled my teeth and the rushing ground made me feel sick. The Alpha howled,

calling the pack to stop. Instantly, the wolves dropped back, standing in a single line aside their leader. The moonlight glinted off their eyes as they turned and strode away.

_Half an hour later _

"_Why did the wolves stop?" Emily asked._

_I halted in a foresty clearing, dropping her gently to the ground as I leant against a tree to gain my breath again. Running almost nonstop for half an hour at around thirty to seventy kilometres an hour could even tax a Spartan. _

"_They may have decided to expend their energy on lesser prey." I answered._

Emily lay down on the cool grass, looking up at the starry sky.

"_Either that, or there's something more dangerous here. Dangerous to them." I added thoughtfully. _

"_Oh wow, that's a really positive thought there, John!" she said sarcastically. _

Emily

The Reclaimer speaks the truth, weak one. You and the other have decided to meddle, and I will accept your challenge.

I started, surprised, and I curled up on the grass whimpering. Not him again! I told him to leave me alone!

"Emily are you okay?"

I opened my eyes to find John kneeling next to me, his blue eyes confused. I launched my arms around his neck and buried my face into his shoulder.

"Emilyâ€|?" he said, surprised. His body was stiff and unyielding, but that wasn't anything unusual.

"The Didactâ€|.He's talking to me."

John drew in a sharp breath.

Telling the other will serve no purpose. The friend of my enemy is my enemy also, the Didact said.

The presence faded.

"John, why are there wolves? We're probably on an alien planet, why are there Earth animals,?" I said, changing the subject.

"The Didact could have created them. They might not be real." He answered somewhat ominously.

He turned his head away and stared off into the distance. I waved my hand in front of his face; his eyes didn't focus on them.

"I don't think you should be involved in this." he said finally.

He turned his head and looked at me, the moonlight glinting eerily off his blue eyes, shadowing his face and outlining his scars. A wolf howled, off in the distance and his pupils narrowed sharply as he gauged the distance.

"We have to keep moving. The wolves may decide to chase us anyway," he announced. He stood, the night brightening slightly; the sun was rising somewhere.

One hour later

Emily

The forest didn't last long. It ended with a vast, snowy field, huge mountains rising in the distance a few kilometres away. The sun cast a pinkish glow in the sky as it began its slow trip over our heads. I looked up at John, his breath rising in small mist clouds.

"How deep do you reckon it is?" I asked.

"I don't know. I haven't encountered much snow in my life."

I shivered, stepping closer to John in the freezing air. He looked down at me curiously, his eyes as cold as the air. But, for the first time, he smiled quite stiffly. It wasn't a big, beaming smile; he didn't even show any teeth. Pretty much, both corners of his mouth rose ever so slightly at the same time. It didn't quite reach his eyes, however, so it made him look somewhat evil. I gave him an exaggerated, huge, ugly smile, raising both eyebrows and tilting my head to the side. He frowned and raised an eyebrow simultaneously in confusion and I laughed, so hard I fell onto the last remnants of forest floor. I accidentally fell into the snow, and I yelped, sunk up to my waist in it. Plus it was freezing cold.

"Ohmygoshohmygoshohmygosh get me out get me out! It's _freezing!_"

John jumped into the snow, only sinking up to his thigh. He put his hands under my arms and lifted me out. His eyes were narrowed somewhat, and I realised he was putting up with the cold. He swung me over his shoulder and I protested.

"Not like THAT! It only makes me feel _sick_."

He held me straight out in front of him like a dolly.

"I will drop you."

"NO! Okay! Okay I'll put up with it."

He threw me over his shoulder this time, and I got the wind knocked out of my lungs as I connected with his rock hard shoulder.

"I'm not a ragdoll!"

"Stop complaining or I will make you walk."

I silenced myself. I should be grateful he saved me from the wolves, that he was with me.

You believe you can run, yet you cannot hide from my eyes.

What do you mean? Why do you keep speaking in stuff like that? I replied to the malevolent voice.

Rough manners and coarse language is something I do not wish to bestow upon myself, weak one. You have chosen your path and I will end it for you. A favour, if you wish.

Go away! I've got better things to do than listen to the ramblings of you!

You would do well to listen, for it may be the last thing you hear.

With a flash, the oppression of the Didact's consciousness was off my thoughts.

I realised with a start John had stopped, his shoulders tense.

"I heard it this time."

"You meanâ€¦we're still kind of connected?"

"Possibly." He answered, suggesting case closed.

"What are we gonna do? I think "last thing you hear" is pretty suggestive.

"We can't do anything. I can't fight him. I don't have my armour, and even with it I don't think I could beat him a second time."

He'd had Cortana last time as well. She'd restrained the Didact with hard light so John could detonate a grenade on his chest.

I buried my icy face into the short, spiky black hair on the back of his head.

"I'm cold."

"There may be caves in the mountains," he said as he began to set a brisk pace wading through the snow. He seemed a little apprehensive with my touch.

"How far away are they?" I said through chattering teeth.

"It will probably take me an hour."

The forest grew farther and farther away as John trudged slowly up a snowy incline.

"Iâ€¦I'll try to wait."

John snapped a branch off a dead tree as he passed it, the noise startling me.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm getting firewood. When we reach the cave, I will build a fire."

I shivered again. John picked up the pace once more.

Forty five minutes later

John

I'd reached the mountain earlier than I expected, but that didn't bother me. I could sense Emily growing weaker and colder. I probably had climbed only one hundred meters up the mountain, but as I didn't know how high we were elevated above sea level, the air was already beginning to thin. I stopped for the second time for a rest, annoyed at my loss of strength. I glanced upwards at the steep, snowy incline, trying to spot a cave. I cocked my head to the side as I saw a dark patch of rock that seemed to go into the snow.

"_I may have found a cave," I announced to Emily. I was quite surprised; I'd expected it to be harder to find some sort of shelter. I didn't think the Didact would make it _quite_ so easy._

She mumbled.

"_Hurry up then. I can't feel my fingers."_

_I sighed at her terrible manners. __I'd dragged her at least thirty kilometres all together and all she had to give me was whining. I dug my feet into the snow and began my trudge again. I reached a ledge of rock sticking out, just below the cave, and I pulled myself up onto it, Emily slung securely over my shoulder. The cave extended at least three meters into the mountain, and then stopped abruptly. I couldn't stand up in it, so I dropped Emily onto the ledge._

"_Hey! What are you doing? Oh. I see. Sorry." She said, crawling into the cave on all fours ahead of me. I crouched and crawled inside. Instantly, the air grew warmer._

"_Wow, it's so snug in here," Emily commented._

I pulled flint and steel out of my black military pants pocket, something I had kept with me in case the light took me somewhere in the wilderness. Seemed like my caution had paid off. I pulled the pieces of branch, kindling and wood off of my other shoulder, building a neat cone. I struck the flint against the steel and sparks flew out, catching alight the dry, dead wood easily. I had made the cone small, so to not smother us and use our oxygen. The sun had risen outside, revealing a beautiful blue sky free of clouds. It was still bitterly cold, however. Emily snuggled close to the fire. I felt a sudden pang of hunger and I realised we still needed food and water. I could provide one of those; I reached out of the cave and grabbed a handful of snow, popping it into a dip in the cave floor. The ice would melt, and we would have water, soon.

"_I'm not particularly thirsty, but I need some food. And no, I'm not whining, because you need food as much as I do."_

"_There are no animals for me to hunt. You know that."_

I'd told him about the lack of animals besides the wolves earlier.

"_Then how will we eat?"_

I looked away at the sky. We could eat wood, or kill the wolves and eat them; however I didn't think that would be particularly easy as they were in a pack. Besides, I didn't think they would be pleasant to eat. I didn't think wood was a nutritious diet either. I couldn't feed Emily or myself. I could only get water.

A few hours later

Emily

Okay, so eating wood was one suggestion. Eating the wolves was another. Wood didn't taste like anything, wasn't technically "living" and probably wasn't the best thing for our bodies to eat. The wolves were beautiful, intelligent, living creatures, even though they had tried to kill John and I, I didn't feel that I could bring myself to eat them. John didn't even have any weapons with him. He could be the one getting eaten. I reminded myself that he'd endangered himself for the sake of others heaps of times and that I was fussing. I stared blankly into the dancing flames of the fire. John was asleep, his back against the wall, his face finally somewhat peaceful. I stared at his scars, wondering how one person could endure so much. He was amazing, but then, he was made to be amazing, a leap in human science. I continued to stare, wondering why he kept protecting me, why he felt that need. He could do anything he wanted; he had the power to do so. He could leave me to die and save himself, yet he didn't.

I became lost in my own thoughts and I hadn't realised John had opened his eyes a crack, regarding me passively out of the corner of his eye. He was neither angry nor irritated; he was simply observing me like I was some sort of strange zoo animal. I blinked in surprise and he opened his eyes fully, continuing his intelligent observation. His pupils, shrunk from the harsh snowy glare outside, seeming to stare into my soul, the emotionless expression deeply chilling. I never really had the time to look deep into his eyes, and now I realised how _broken _he was as a human being. I shivered and looked away. I opened my palms to the fire to warm them and I shut my eyes with relish. I heard a rough scraping noise and I saw John had somehow pulled a standard issue UNSC knife out of his pocket; the Spartan was chiselling out a piece of wood, bright blue eyes fixed on the object of his task. I stared, surprised. It must have been a compactible knife or something. Again, his eyes shifted sideways and he looked once more at me, this time a questioning glance, like he was waiting for me to say something. I pulled a big lip at him and looked away. The hunger was beginning to come now, a cramping in my stomach and I curled up into a ball, attempting to alleviate the feeling. The rough scraping noise started again and I felt myself drifting off to sleep, the repetitive sound lulling me.

I woke sometime later to a howl. Very close. I looked for John and I saw no one in the cave with me. I drew my knees up to my chest, scared. Why would he leave me with the wolves? They howled again, the sound echoing eerily off the mountain. I stuck my head outside to be greeted by the two moons, blazing brightly. The mountain was awash with their light, every rock shadowed. The fire warmed my back while

my front froze, and I withdrew quickly, shivering. Then I heard an excited bark, only probably around ten meters away. The wolves would have seen the light in the cave; I'd been found. I heard panting and paws crunching on the snow, and a snout poked into the cavern. I screamed. I'd be torn apart, played with, and then finally eaten. In came a head, followed by blazing yellow eyes, my terrified expression reflected in them. I tried to scramble back, but the cave wouldn't go any further; I was trapped. More wolves appeared outside on the ledge, one striding through the middle: the Alpha. He was bigger than the rest, his coat glossier and his fur fluffier. Another followed close behind, probably the Beta. The other three were Omegas, the lowest of their pack order, skinny and bony. A rush of cold air blew through the cave and the fire went out. I screamed and screamed, but the wolves didn't flinch.

"There is no need to scream." The Alpha said, in a husky, deep voice.

I didn't think I could scream anyway, I was so stunned. They could talk? I blocked everything else out. I babbled indecently.

"Why? why can't I scream? I mean, I would scream anyway but you can talk so I'm so surprised I can't scream and, and and..Oh the fire went out I can't light it again, look you're really scaring me so can you-"

"_SILENCE!,"_ the Alpha snapped, cutting off my blabbering, his fur fluffed up.

His silver grey fur settled back down again, and I shrunk back, shutting my mouth.

"I've come to take you into our pack. Your companion has left to find food; he wasn't to know you could die. One of the other packs around here could have found you."

"Why would you help me? And? There's more of you?"

"It is against our nature to abandon a pup," the Beta said in a feminine voice, completely ignoring my question.

"Oh, so you would have eaten me if my friend hadn't left?"

"We do not eat defenceless beings, otherwise they are not worthy of death. An opponent who can fight is worthy." The Alpha said, snapping at an Omega who had whimpered.

"I still don't trust you. I mean, you're talking _wolves_ for Christ sake. I think I'll just wait for my friend to come back."

"He will probably not make it. Our whole pack is ten wolves; we are only half; the others are hunting him as we speak. Another pack hunts him also, they will kill him."

I started with shock; this wasn't the whole pack of wolves?! Only like a squad or something. I got up quickly, pushing past the Alpha who growled. The Omegas whimpered, snapping at my heels.

"I gotta save my friend; I don't want him to be torn apart by

wolves!"

I wanted to believe this was just a dream, the wolves couldn't talk, John was right next to me. Everything was fine. I tried to blunder off the mountain.

The Beta launched herself at my jeans, her jaws snapping shut and halting my frantic dash off the ledge. She mumbled through my pants,

"Our wolves, they don't know about you. They will rip you apart."

"Well, we gotta stop em!," I said, my teeth chattering. I had already begun to lose feeling in my fingers.

The Beta let go, and I tumbled down the steep snowy slope, flinging the white stuff everywhere until I was stopped by a tree trunk.

"OW!"

I heard paws crunching on the snow and I sat up, surrounded by the three Omegas and the Alpha and Beta.

"You'll die before we get there," an Omega commented.

"You said something about there being other packs. Are there more than just yours?"

"There is only two other packs. One lives in the forest from the direction you came from; the other is far away, out past these mountains." The Alpha answered.

"Wait, so you mean that the pack that chased us across the moors wasn't you guys? They stopped as soon as we reached the forest at the edge of the mountains. I think they were a squad too. There were only five."

"They stopped because they were about to enter our territory."

I still couldn't believe I was talking to _wolves_, even stranger almost than the light and John. I didn't feel like much conversation.

"Where is your home? I'm freezing."

Sometime later

Emily

The wolves didn't have a "home" so to speak; they had a simple snow cave lined with fur and bark; however the cave was huge, at least two meters high and four meters wide. The expanses of the snow cave were probably three meters back. For light, there was an eerie glowing in the ice. As I entered, the fur cushioned out the cold and the bark stopped my hands from touching the cold snow, the perfect insulating combinations. As a result, the air was instantly warmer. The Alpha followed after, then the other wolves. I sat in a corner, as far away as possible from them, I didn't know if I could trust them yet and I

wasn't willing to try their patience. The Alpha lounged, stretching out, and the Beta lay next to him, grooming his fur and I realised soon she may be the Alpha female. I smirked inwardly; if they were human I would have teased them ruthlessly. Hopefully they wouldn't erâ€do their thing while I was around.

The Alpha spoke, his deep and husky voice startling me.

"Tell me about this companion of yours. The wolves in the forest communicated that he was worthy prey, that he was theirs to hunt. You see, that pack has eaten all the food sources in that forest; you may have heard the silence. They are starving."

"Wellâ€|.we're from a different world..I thought I'd start with that," I paused, waiting for barks of laughter and howls of amusement, but the Alpha simply tilted his silver head, the fur over his shoulders rippling. The glow from the strange light in the ice threw his eye sockets into shadow, and his yellow eyes gleamed intelligently.

"Go on, pup."

"Okayâ€|there is this world with aliens and crafts that travel through space, that's where my friend comes from, he's a solider, he fights against the aliens. I'm from another world, we don't have high tech stuff, half of our population doesn't live in space, and we almost certainly do not have super soldiers, like my friend is."

The Alpha seemed to understand, his yellow eyes curious.

"How do you know about this stuff?" I asked him.

"The One who rules all on this planet."

"The Didact?" I asked, although I thought I already knew the answer.

He nodded.

"He gives us knowledge and food for our services. We are the guardians of this world, we have seen all, and I know that life could not exist without the One. He created the food in that forest for the other wolves, but they no longer wish to obey his command. They have therefore, run out."

"How do you exist in the first place if life cannot be made naturally?"

"The One has his own plans, and servants are needed to keep them safe."

"Theâ€|the wolves are going to kill John! We've got to help him..," I remembered with a flash, and I sniffed, tears forming.

The Beta got up, padding softly over to me. I shrunk back, but all she did was lick my tears away and tilt her furry head to the side, her yellow eyes sympathetic.

"Little pup, I know you are scared for your friend, but if our wolves find him first, he will be safe."

I looked up.

"Your wolves aren't going to kill him?"

"No, they are saving him from the other, forest pack. Do not worry, our wolves are more swift footed then the forest ones," the Beta answered. She sat next to me and I resisted the urge to bury my face into her soft silver fur. The Omegas eyed me greedily, and I knew that if the Alpha wasn't here I would have been ripped apart already.

A wolf howled in the distance and the Alpha's ears pricked.

"They've found him."

John

I eyed the five wolves cautiously as one of them spoke.

"_We're not here to hurt you. Other wolves may come soon, they will be the ones to cause you harm."_

I didn't reply; strange enough that they were talking wolves, strange enough to be a threat. I could see every line of muscles under their thick, silver coats and I knew I might be hard pressed to kill them all. I heard more paws crunching, and another five wolves melted out of the night. They were so well camouflaged even I could not pick them out from the snow and the shadows the moonlight cast. But then, I spotted Emily, stumbling along behind them and I ignored the wolves. So be it if they decided to rip me apart, I was going to protect her from these over grown dogs. I lifted her up and I stood in a classic attack stance, but Emily wouldn't cooperate and squirmed wildly.

"_PUT ME DOWN YOU BIG OAF!" she roared. _

"_The wolves are friends, okay? The other wolves, the ones that chased us, they're a different pack." she announced, pointing to the knife still in my hand. She wanted me to dis arm myself? I didn't know if I could trust her, although I wanted to. Something in my training stopped me from doing so. I looked at the wolves, but I didn't see any kind of threat in their intense yellow gaze, and they weren't in threatening postures, either. I let Emily down and looked her in the eye, folding up my knife. She looked away, as usual; squirming under my powerful gaze. I put the knife in my pocket and watched the wolves. Waiting for death._

Emily

The Alpha stalked up to John, his yellow eyes matching the Spartan's cold gaze.

"I require your help, human. The wolf packs of this world wish to be free of the One's rule, and I know from his teachings that you are the one to do it. I have communicated with the other packs; they understand; they want to leave. I request that you take us with you when you return to your worlds. Without the One, we would die."

John's blue eyes glinted in the darkness; I could see his pupils narrowing in the moonlight.

"The One is the Didact, correct, wolf?" he asked.

The Alpha nodded.

John turned his head to look at me, suspiciously. I knew that look, like I'd done something wrong. The empty blue eyes again, pierced my soul, like he was searching for guilt.

TRAITORS! YOU SHALL PAY FOR YOUR MISTAKE!, the Didact's voice boomed through my head.

I watched with horror as John's blue eyes rolled up into his head and he toppled into the snow. He slumped on his back and didn't get up.

MY ENEMIES SHALL PERISH!

With a flash, I was reminded of Lasky. Maybe if we got rid of the Didact, he would get better? But we couldn't do anything now. I rushed over to John, shaking him roughly.

"John? John! JOHN!"

He didn't respond. The wolves padded over, their paws crunching in the snow. I tried to feel his neck for a pulse but my fingers were so numb I couldn't. I hyperventilated, he couldn't be dead, couldn't! It's impossible! I laid my head on his chest, and thankfully I felt the faint rise and fall of it. I calmed my breath and sobbed quietly. Another big scare; I didn't know how much more I could take of this.

"The One has deactivated him, at least for a while; but he can renew his hold over your companion at any time. The only way we can free him is to get rid of the One." The Beta said, her voice sad.

"We need a plan! But we don't even know where the Didact is! How are we gonna fight him? John was probably our only hope, now he's lying on his back in the snow, in some sort of sleep," I shouted angrily.

I looked down at the huge fallen figure at my feet, face serene, a rare occurrence, even while he was sleeping. For once, I actually wanted to see the intelligent icy blue eyes and see his silent amusement.

"The One is everywhere and anywhere at once. Only the person he wants to meet shall meet him."

OI! COME OUT HERE AND SHOW YOURSELF! HOW DARE YOU THREATEN MY FRIENDS! I screamed mentally at the presence still in my head.

You do not wish to see me, weak one, for I will be the last thing you ever do.

Oh ho ho, hell yes! You control these wolves like puppets, you cause my friend to fall into some sleep and now you threaten us?

I realised my mistake. Seeing red, I went too far.

I felt a strange sucking feeling, and the snow around me writhed, the moons warping strangely. Then I could see nothing.

I could open my eyes sometime later to find I was suspended by some weird blue light, forming cuffs around my wrists and attaching them to the roof, a dark grey metal. Strange, alien lights on the metal illuminated the room. I tugged on my restraints but they didn't budge. I tried my ankles but they were likewise held fast to the floor. I looked up and saw him; the Didact in full armour, about fourteen feet tall. His helmet was shaped like a skull, outlined by weird orange glowing lines. The armour was fixed on a dark brown over suit, lined, and the chest and thigh pieces were flat, again, outlined with glowing orange. I screamed, struggling, but it did nothing to the hard light chains.

"You wanted to meet me human. Accept your fate." The Didact's deep voice rumbled. I closed my eyes. John will help me. John will save me. He always does.

"Exactly, human. You will lure the reclaimer into my trap."

I recoiled. He could read my thoughts and now I was bait?!_ I gulped nervously, examining where I was. Past the Didact was a large room, filled with holographic monitors and screens and a large beam of light flashed down from the roof to the floor, and I thought it must be some type of teleporter, probably what John would come through, that is, if he knew where to find the other one, and if he would wake up. I wouldn't look at the Didact, closing my eyes. I didn't know how much more I could take before I finally broke.

John

I rolled my shoulders stiffly, shaking the snow off of my legs and ruffling my hair to get it out. I looked at the silver grey wolf, the Alpha who stood next to me, growling.

"_So the Didact took her?"_

"_Yes, he teleported her, right here. He could not have taken you, only one at a time may be taken and only once a month; the month is for the recharge of the One's power. It may be hard to believe, but the One does have limits."_

_Probably a trap, if the Didact had just taken her and not me; better to kill two birds with one stone. He knew that I would go after her.

_

"_Is there another way in?"_

"_A teleporter, somewhere. It has been so long since anyone used it, no one really knows where it is anymore."_

I looked off into the rising sun. It was very obviously a trap, but I had no other choice and the Didact knew it too. Either I came, or she died. The snow glinted yellow as the sun continued to rise, painting the sky a light pink. I heard rather loud crunching as the wolves stood in a perfect line, the Alpha in front.

"_We want to be rid of this threat. We shall help you in your task, as an enemy of my enemy is my friend." The Alpha said, tipping up his head to howl. The other wolves followed suit and the dawn echoed with the chorus of the wolf. For the first time, I thought I recognized beauty when I heard it. It hurt my ears but it didn't matter to me, at least I had backup. First, however, we needed to find the teleporter. The Beta seemed to read my thoughts, her strange feminine voice causing me to turn my head._

"_The one place that may have it is that cave you were in. I did not know why you didn't stop to think why the cave came to such an abrupt end; that is a door. It is very primitive, a pressure plate located on the wall to the left. The teleporter _could_ be in the small room behind it."_

I cocked my head to the side. The reason I'd never found it was because I didn't even know it existed. I didn't really think about the cave stopping so abruptly because that was not part of my training. I wasn't a detective.

"_What are we waiting for?"_

_The cave seemed harder than before to reach, loose snow and rocks hampering the wolves and myself. It took the better part of a day and by the time we'd reached it the wolves and myself were thoroughly exhausted. I crawled into the cave, my breath billowing out in clouds in front of me, the wolves following and crowding into the cave. I looked closely at the wall and I saw the outline of something. I could see the tiny cracks in the wall, and I pressed in between two that seemed _just_ a little too perfect and angular. Too easy, I should have expected more, but then, the Didact wanted me to come. The wall made a high pitched squealing noise and I winced, flinching away from it. Dust showered from the roof and straight into my delicate eyes. I blinked rapidly against the pain the small particles caused. When I opened them, a dark hole had appeared in the back wall of the cave, the wolves already streaming in through the opening. I strode forward, delaying a little to let my eyes adjust properly; instantly I could see the room was quite small, probably only around three meters wide and four meters high, the floor a smooth, dark metal. The wolves snuffed, investigating the strange light in the centre of the room that ran from the roof to the floor._

"_Comrades, I think we have found the teleporter! I do not know if it still travels to its intended destination, however," the Alpha said, yapping happily. "But maybe, just maybe, we shall soon be free from the tyranny of our master."_

Probably. More than likely we would all die; I knew that much from previous experiences. I felt a small wash of uselessness, but I shoved it aside as I usually did.

"_There is only one way to find out if this still works," I said, squinting closely at the light. I turned to the Beta, "We'll have to try it."_

The Alpha barked sharply, "I wouldn't mind the risk. We would die from the One anyway."

_He stepped cautiously towards the light, his black nose snuffling the air. His silver grey coat fluffed up and he advanced slowly. He

turned back towards us, "Follow, my comrades. Be brave," he said, leaping gracefully into the light. I narrowed my eyes, walking in also. I couldn't see, and the sensation was similar to that of the Light. I felt myself deposited gently on my feet and I opened my eyes to find the Didact staring at me._

Emily

"JOHN! GO WHILE YOU CAN!" I screamed, straining uselessly against my chains. His blue eyes flicked from the Didact's imposing figure, twice as tall as he was, to me. He seemed calm and a stream of wolves appeared behind him, growling and low to the ground, their teeth bared. The Didact huffed.

"My former servants are a poor excuse for backup, reclaimer," he said disdainfully.

John didn't reply, instead I could tell he was planning. The Didact didn't wait for him to get any further, swinging a clawed hand at him, but John seemed to move at blinding speed, dodging the swipe. The attack hit a young Omega, who died instantly as the claws ripped through his body, and the Alpha howled angrily. The silvery wolf leapt at the Didact, crunching his jaws on his armoured arm, but the Didact threw him off, and the Alpha flew into a wall, collapsing on his flank. He didn't move and I screamed again, my throat raw. How many of my friends had to die? WHY!? The other wolves barked angrily, throwing themselves at the ancient alien. I closed my eyes but soon opened them again as I felt a tug on my hard light chains. John pulled resolutely at them with all his might, but they didn't break. He was frowning thunderously, his blue eyes confused. He turned his head to look at me, irritated.

"For once, I can't seem to break something," he announced, frustrated.

I wanted to just fall into his arms and sleep. My battered and exhausted body just could not cope anymore. My eyes closed slowly. My moment of peace didn't last long as I heard a startled sound from John and I opened my eyes to see the Didact dragging him along the floor with some kind of telekinesis. He tried to stand but the ancient Forerunner reached out his hand, and John's eyes narrowed. He seemed to choke and I realised the Didact was crushing him. For the first time I could see something resembling pain fill John's eyes; the remaining wolves howled piteously as they watched the Spartan slowly die. I couldn't do anything anyway. I felt numb, detached. I didn't care. I didn't care. Why couldn't they just shut up and let me sleep? John looked straight at me, but I didn't see any resignation or sadness, no begging for mercy either. He seemedâ€¦apologetic, almost like he'd failed, like he wasn't just about to run out of air and collapse, dead onto the floor. His eyes slowly lost intelligence and grew blank. Then they rolled up into his head and he slumped onto the floor.

Wait.

John was _dead?_

NO!

I wrenched strongly at my light chains and they shattered, weakened

from John's efforts. The last of the wolves attacked the Didact, their fight renewed. John mightn't be dead. He couldn't be. I looked around and spotted my weapon; loose panelling on the ceiling that if I hit hard enough, would fall on the Didact and possibly kill him. I grinned crazily. Oh what the heck, I don't give a crap anymore. I knew I was going stupid but did it matter? An almost vertical ramp led up to the panelling, the large room filled with toppled monitors, somehow migrating from the smaller room through the alien corridor. Broken hard light shards littered the ground, and I managed to drag myself painfully over to the ramp, my battered body and chafed wrists and ankles hampering me. I climbed slowly up it, sliding my hands and feet into grooves in the metal. I reached the top, and I stretched upwards, touching the panelling.

That was all it took.

Half the roof came smashing down around me, covering the Didact and smothering the wolves. Time seemed to slow down as I watched a piece of metal head straight towards me. I couldn't dodge that; it hit me on the head. I felt a brief flash of pain as I was knocked out.

My body toppled, unconscious, into the falling pieces.

Unknown time later

Emily

I couldn't move. Couldn't breathe. I struggled, trying to cry out. I saw death, blood, violence. Wars, peace, and treaties. Huge spaceships, aliens, weapons. I screamed. An alien executed a marine in front of me, and I watched his headless body topple. WAKE UP! WAKE UP GODAMMIT!

My eyelids fluttered open and I breathed in deeply, smelling fresh, clean, crisp air. It smelt of pine needles and grass, and I found myself in a pristine forest, sunlight filtering through the trees. Every tree, every leaf, seemed so perfect.

Was I dead? Was this what heaven looked like?

I sat up, my muscles screaming in protest. I didn't expect to see a familiar face cocked to the side, intelligent blue eyes concerned. The Spartan crouched in front of me, and I gasped in astonishment; I threw myself at John, hugging him. He sighed softly and relaxed.

"You're alive! I thought you were deadâ€¦".

I wouldn't let go.

"Spartans never die."

I sat back, blinking. Not that old saying. Spartans do die.

I sniffed, burying my face into his shoulder.

He looked off into the trees.

"We're in your world," he looked back at me again. "The light took us all, the wolf packs too. They are currently hiding, waiting, for the

light to take them somewhere more suitable."

I struggled to keep my eyes open, I was still tired.

"Whereabouts in my world are we? If we're in a highly populated place we're screwed, like China; if we were in China about a million people would have seen us already."

"I don't know. I don't have a way of checking our position," John said.

I stood slowly, my legs shaking and my calves aching. I felt my knees buckle and John caught me.

"Where do you think you're going?"

"To see where the heck we are! I don't think the light would take us too far from where I live. I want to get you and the wolves safe."

"You're in no condition to go anywhere."

"Easy for you to say, you could have _died._"

He looked at me sharply.

"Emily, the Didact wouldn't just _kill_ me. He would have made sure I died slowly; I was only unconscious Emily," he stated flatly.

I collapsed into his chest, again closing my eyes.

"John! I don't want you to be captured or anything and I don't want the wolves to get hurt!"

He sighed quietly, hoisting me into his arms.

"I'll take you around; see if you'll recognise anything."

He strode quietly through the forest, and I noticed the gum trees, and Australian scrubland.

We broke out into a clearing, leaving behind the forest.

"It's Wirraglen! John, we're back here! We have to be careful, I don't know what day it is, and there could be kids here."

The grass crunched quietly under John's silent footsteps. He turned his blue eyes onto me, narrowing them slightly. He didn't look nervous at the prospect of being discovered, just irritated.

"You know just as well as I do that we can't be seen."

I struggled; trying to get down, John dropped me gently. I found I could stand, and I scrambled forward up a hill toward Wirraglen. John followed me slowly, and I peeked over the rise. Kids ran everywhere, up, down, all around the Wirraglen building. I spotted Oliver with Chloe and his sister Daisy, his tan brown face scrunched up with laughter. Chloe flicked her long brown hair and Daisy swung her small pink bag around.

"It must be Thursday, John! That's the only day when all these people come."

He turned his blue eyes to look at me.

"You realise you have been missing? I don't know how time passes compared to your world and the one that we were in. For all we know, you could have been missing for weeks," John said. "I can't take you back to your house, either. I don't have active camouflage."

A voice sounded behind us.

"I think I can help with that."

I whirled around,

"Lasky?!"

The commander smiled and nodded. I launched forward; I hugged him and wouldn't let go. He wasn't sick anymore; he didn't smell sickly sweet and like disinfectant and blood. The old cinnamon smell was back, and I sniffed it in gratefully.

"You're better!" I mumbled into his uniform.

"No thanks to you and John. The light took me here shortly after I recovered. I took supplies just in case, and I happened to bring what you two seem to need." He said, amused at my sudden attachment to him. I stepped back and smiled at him, Thomas's brown eyes warm. John began one of his cold and reserved examinations that he always did; seeming to make sure Thomas was really there. I thwacked his arm, and gave him a disapproving look. He turned a withering glare onto me. Lasky held out a strange ball and John took it gratefully.

"There is also the problem of wolves, you two. Don't forget the wolves." Thomas said.

"How'd you know about them?"

"While I was sick, I could see the world that you were in, like a spectator. I could hear what you were saying, see what you were doing. Trust me, I know everything you did."

I shivered. The thought of Thomas watching over us creeped me out.

"There is also the problem of the children," John interjected suddenly.

Thomas pursed his lips.

"I have a feeling my time here may be limited. Your world is very beautiful, Emily. I wish I could live here."

The light swelled behind Lasky as he spoke. He turned and stared at it for a minute.

"Well, it looks like my time was very limited," he said, chuckling to himself. "Goodbye, you two. Make sure you get Emily back to her house without any trouble."

With that, he jumped back into the glowing light. I blinked. That was quick and painless.

I turned to John.

"Do you really think the Didact is dead?"

He shook his head slowly.

"He is too powerful for a mere piece of panelling to kill him. I woke up shortly after you had destroyed the room."

He hoisted me into his arms again and I squealed with surprise.

"Can we _please_ _not_ _run_ back to my house?"

He raised an eyebrow sarcastically.

"Yes, I want to be deafened by your screaming, Emily."

Twenty minutes later

Emily

The rhythmic movement of John's walking began to lull me to sleep, relaxing my traumatized muscles and soothing my stressed brain, but I still couldn't get a fact out of my mind.

"John, I'm still scared."

As we were both in active camouflage, I could see him. His blue eyes focused on my face, still cold and hard as ever.

"You're fine," John said simply. The crunch of the rocks under his black boots grew monotonous and annoying. I snuggled into his strong shoulder and sniffed quietly, my emotions overflowing. I wasn't walking because my body just wouldn't. My legs swung in time to the Spartan's stride, and before long I felt myself drifting off again.

John

_Again, Emily fell limp as she drifted back into sleep, her tear streaked face lolling backwards. I knew _what_ she felt, but again, I couldn't _feel_ _it_. I continued my slow walk, respectful of Emily's need to rest and the fact that a slower moving shimmer would be less obvious than a fast one. Luckily, Thomas had brought the upgraded model of active camouflage which could last for around two hours, compared to the usual one minute. Strange cars drove past, blowing Emily's hair around and ruffling mine. I didn't notice that I arrived almost mindlessly at the child's house; I laid Emily down gently on the grass, careful to not lose contact or she would lose her camo. I looked up, at the white walls and the front door of her home, the small gate at the side. As I watched, the front door opened and for the first time I saw Emily's parents. Her father was almost bald, a small bit of black hair remained at the back of his head, he had a close cropped black beard and her mother had puffy red hair, short. Both looked to be a few years older than myself, at least around forty five or fifty. Their faces were sad and their postures were

slumped. I cocked my head to the side._

_So, Emily _was_ missing, after all, I thought. She shifted, opening her eyes. I kept a firm grip on her arm, so she wouldn't lose contact; she turned to look at her parents and tugged roughly, her eyes filled with dismay. She mouthed words at me angrily._

LET ME GO! JOHN!

_I forced some pity into my eyes and said nothing. _

"_Emily!" her mother called hopefully. Unbeknownst to her, her daughter was five meters away with my hand over her mouth. Emily cried quietly into my hand, her body slumping onto the ground again. Her parents turned and closed the door slowly. Instantly, Emily bit my hand and writhed in my grip. The bite to the hand stung a little, but quickly faded into nothing as always._

"_Stop! You _know_ we can't just appear out of nowhere!" I fumed angrily. The lawn under my folded knees crunched softly and I sighed at the fact I would probably get grass stains. Emily sobbed as she frantically tried to swallow her emotions. I stood and pulled her upwards with me._

"_John please! I want to go home!"_

For the first time in a while, I actually felt something. Emily was probably ecstatic the whole time to get home, yet she was stopped literally meters away from what she loved the most. I thought for a moment. One way in, one way out. I was going to have to do what I was not supposed to do.

"_Emily, I'm going to knock on the door and hand you in."_

"_Johnâ€¦|.You don't like stuff like thatâ€¦|.You'll stuff up."_

I stared her down quietly. Her eyes grew grateful and watery, and I turned off the active camo and I tenderly reached for her hand; it would not do to go walking up to her front door and not looking like I actually found her. She looked up at me in surprise and took my hand rather apprehensively, holding it out stiffly in front of her. I pulled her forward and knocked on the large wooden door loudly. I smiled wryly inside; I usually would just punch the door down in my usual line of work. Inside, even though they were down the end of the house, I heard hurried bare feet slapping on the bare tile floor. I sincerely hoped that they wouldn't notice the UNSC insignia on the left side of my long sleeved grey shirt. The door was thrown open, and Emily's parents stood in front of me, expressions of hope on their faces. Her dad was shorter than me, about a one foot and a little more. They saw Emily, who let go of my hand and leapt at her parents, laughing happily. They hugged her and kissed her and laughing, tickled her. I watched the scene with some amusement, Emily's beet red cheeks after she was tickled was quite hilarious. After a while, her father straightened and looked at me gratefully. I could see my icy blue eyes reflected in his chocolate ones, and I looked down at him.

"_Thanks mate. How did you find her?" he said in a classic Australian accent._

I thought for a moment, but Emily noticed and saved my bacon.

"_Dad, invite him in! Don't be rude," she chastised. _

_Her father looked down at her and waved me in. I gave Emily a withering look when her parents turned to walk back into the kitchen, she shrugged and grinned wolfishly. I strode in after her parents, making sure I wiped my boots clean on the brown mat inside. I may not be good at social interaction, but I knew I shouldn't track dirty boot prints all over the white tile floor. A lounge room went off to the right, with a huge television and couches. Further along the white hallway a room branched off to the left, Emily's parent's bedroom. I followed helplessly along behind Emily's parents, dismayed at my predicament; hopefully Emily would help me through some of the "social" things. Her parents entered a kitchen with another flat screen television and sat down on some couches in front of it. I lingered uncertainly, and Emily jerked her head over ever so slightly. I strode over, looking about me, slightly anxious. I sat stiffly down beside Emily, and her mother who sat next to her examined me closely. Her father sat on another couch ajar. Emily ever so slowly lowered her hand on top of mine and held it. Her mother kissed her again and hugged her happily, happy tears falling from her eyes. _

"_How did you find our precious daughter?" her father asked once more._

I'd already thought of an explanation.

"_I found her lost, wandering your town." I tried to say normally, but I still couldn't get that flat note out of my voice. Emily hugged me sweetly, and I forced myself to smile stiffly. _

"_American," her dad whispered, not intending me to hear, but he wasn't to know I could hear a pin drop from one hundred meters away.

_

"_Thank you. May I ask your name? We'll need to tell the police that we found our daughter," her mother said, kissing Emily on the forehead again._

I opened my mouth and closed it, and Emily squeezed my hand.

"_John. My name is John."_

"_Last name?" her father asked._

_Emily turned her head so her parents couldn't see and mouthed "Make one up". _

"_Bird. John Bird."_

"_Would you like some tea, or coffee orâ€¦." Her mother suggested._

"_No thanks, ma'am. I have to get going," I said, my American accent spoiling the ma'am as I tried to say it without an emotionless tone.

—
"Thank you again, John," Emily's father said. —

Five hours later

Emily

I stood outside in the crisp night air, the time ten o'clock at night. I'd opened the door silently and slipped out into the cool, clear night. The moonlight allowed me to see quite well, and I sat on the lawn and waited. The trees in the middle of the road rustled eerily as wind blew my hair and ruffled my Angry Bird pyjamas. I shivered; they were only shorts and a T shirt.

"John, come on out," I whispered. I stood and reached out a hand, waiting for him. After about a minute, a strong hand folded around mine.

"You're still here?"

John appeared, switching off his active camouflage. His blue eyes reflected the full moon above my head and his spiky black hair ruffled in the breeze.

"I don't know why the light has not taken me back."

I hugged him, snuggling into his warm body as I tried to stop shivering. John wrapped his arms around me and I could feel his warm breath over my head, stirring my strawberry blonde hair. I liked to think of him as my kind of guardian, just for me. I couldn't exactly call him an angel, more like an angel of death.

"Thanks for saving me, John. You're so amazing!"

He didn't comment.

"And by the way, John Bird? Really? What kind of last name is that?"

"You were the one who forced me to go inside, you were the one who drove unlicensed," he shot back. I pushed him away and folded my arms, pulling a big lip and frowning. I couldn't hold my serious pose against his deliberate blank face and stare and I broke out laughing.

"Shut up!" — I said.

He raised an eyebrow.

"Stop it!"

It rose further.

"Would. You. Stop. Doing. That!"

He tickled me, and I fell, giggling crazily, on the ground. He bent his long legs and continued to poke my ribs, and I could feel how much he was holding back his strength.

"Sttoooooop! HAHAAHAHAHA!"

I couldn't believe I had _the_ Master Chief playing with me, but after all the stuff I'd been through it didn't seem that weird. I attempted to noogie him, but he reacted as fast as lightning and blocked my hand, looking from it and to my face, his expression a fake frown. The playful moment was halted as I realised I could feel the light's heat on my back. I pulled away from it and stepped backwards, but John walked forward expectantly. Just before he reached the pulsating orb of light, he turned to me.

"I don't know what these travels mean. For once, I can't stop something, I can't understand something. But thank you. I think you'veâ€|made me realise I can do other things than be a mindless killing machine."

He leapt into the light, leaving me no room for comment.

"Thank you for what?"

But he was already gone.

A few days later

John

The wolves barked happily as the light dumped us all in a pristine, snowy forest. They rolled in the snow, yipping, playing and growling. The Alpha tackled me before I could get up, licking my face.

"_Thank you! Thank you, Spartan! This will be our sanctuary, our oasis in the desert."_

I pushed the excited wolf off me and fixed him with a frown.

"_I hope this will wash out," I said, examining my slobbery clothes.

_

_The Alpha Female stood next to her mate, licking his face and grooming his ears, and he returned the favour happily. Their yellow eyes glowed with happiness as they strode off together in the falling snow. _

Maybe this wasn't the end?

Maybe there was more?

I didn't know.

_After all, I was just a Spartan. _

6. The Legacy (Sequel)

The Legacy

Emily's house

Emily

Life couldn't be called normal after everything I'd been through. Everything seemed different to me now, in ways I couldn't explain; I'd learnt things, and seen things that I shouldn't have. I'd retained some of John's memories, too- and I must say they weren't particularly pleasant. None of them seemed to be, but that was just John, wasn't it? It didn't help, either, that we'd both retained some sort of telepathic stuff after we went to the Didact's world. How the link could work through space and time, I had no idea. Wasn't my place to know. I didn't care, either. The Spartan was good company, in a very serious, strict and slightly overkill manner.

I started back into consciousness as the tutor of Maths Online- a website to help me learn maths, began talking. His voice was slightly distorted as it emerged from the Ipad Air's speakers.

When would I get to go back to the Halo world?

How?

Where?

I didn't listen to the tutor's pre-recorded blabber about percentages.

Six minutes later

I blinked in confusion. How was I supposed to work this out? Fifteen percent of four hundred dollars? How did that work!? Ummmâ€|Maybe let's try..

Sixty dollars, John announced.

I nearly dropped my pencil.

That's all very well, but I need to know how to do it! If you do it, that's cheating, I shot back.

You weren't listening.

JOHN!

Put the percent over one hundred. Put the quantity under one. Cancel zeros, if you can. Times.

Thank you! I said sarcastically.

I won't help you every time.

I didn't expect you to, I replied haughtily.

I shifted on the plastic chair- the cold tiles on the floor made my feet uncomfortable. The white walls disappeared as I focused intensely on my next "Percentages of Quantities" question.

Thirty-four point five six.

JOHN!

I could almost imagine the smirk on his face.

Four hours later

UNSC Infinity

John

Irritatingly- Emily's maths questions still wandered obliquely through my head, and I did my best to ignore them as I marched, Kelly, Fred and Linda all behind me. It was only for the benefit of an inspection officer, Mr Daniel Lazlo. At least, that's what I thought his name was. I grimaced mentally as the black wool of my formal dress scratched against my skin. It'd been too long since I was last in the comfortable gel undersuit of my armour. Lasky, on a catwalk above us, watched as Spartan Sarah Palmer attempted to get the unruly Spartan fours into a line.

Woooooow - is this what you do all day? Seems soooo fun!, Emily commented sarcastically.

I almost tripped over my meticulously polished boots. Hopefully my minor slip up wasn't noticed by the extremely critical Lazlo.

It's only an inspection, I replied, miffed.

For that guy? She said, suggesting Daniel standing next to Thomas. He was a short, stout man with a wrinkled face and a smugness of someone superior, which in fact he was not. Inspection officers held no command- so even a non-commissioned officer like me could order him around. The suit he was wearing was completely black and plain, and he looked about fifty. Lazlo sensed my gaze, as a lot of people could, and he regarded me with something akin to contempt. I stared back at him coldly. Seemingly to his own disgust, the officer couldn't help but look away. Fred noticed and scoffed.

"_No use thinking you are superior if you cannot prove the fact," he muttered._

Daniel called a halt, taking charge even when he held no command.

_I'd like to kick this guy's ass, John, Emily said evilly. _

_I silently agreed. _

"_That's enough!" Lazlo yelled in an incredibly high pitched and girly voice - for a man. Daniel strode down the catwalk stairs and swaggered over to the perfect line of my Spartans. He smiled that irritating smug smile and looked at Blue Team with an evil eye._

"_Spartan one one seven- you were fine. You- the other guy; yes, you, the one with the brown eyes."_

_Kelly hissed, angry at his rudeness. _

"_You were less than average," he continued, examining his fingernails disinterestedly._

Fred didn't react.

"_You- the woman with the blue eyes. You were horrible. I'd compare you to a drunken whale."_

Kelly turned red and glared.

"_You- the small one, with the green eyes. I hardly noticed you. Step up!"_

Linda growled. Kelly probably wished to punch this man's face in and Linda probably wished for a sniper rifle to blow his head off. I'd had enough- they had names, and so did I, and we weren't prize pigs, either.

"_Sir, perhaps you should make sure _you_ are working properly, not us," I said mildly._

Kelly sniggered and Emily giggled. Daniel turned red.

"_How dare you? I'm the inspection officer! You can't challenge me!"_

Fred gained a smug look in his eyes.

"_Inspection officers have no rank or command. I could order you."_

Daniel blinked, defeated- but he returned to smugness mode, stalking over to the Spartan fours. He flung departing words over his shoulder.

"_Seven out of ten. Three points deducted for obvious reasons."_

Kelly opened her mouth to retort.

"_Would you like another deducted?"_

_Kelly shut her mouth and fumed. _

Two hours later

John

I heaved a massive sigh, sitting at my desk to fill out yet another set of paperwork for Blue Team.

Hard day, huh? Emily asked. I can keep you company, if you like?

That's what I'm afraid of, I replied.

Shut up, she retorted.

Same could be said to you, Emily.

She ignored that.

What was the point of all that marching and parading?

It's something like showing off, I replied as I concentrated on writing a detailed explanation of operating procedures.

That's dumb.

To you, perhaps.

_I had blissful silence for five minutes. _

_What's seven times seven?, Emily's voice burst into my serenity.

_

I nearly created a huge scribble on my paper.

_Forty-nine, I replied, irritated. Let me finish my paperwork.

_

Oh. Sorry.

Six hours later

I had another "showing off" thing to do today- basically, just the same thing as yesterday. Even I didn't know why the parade was being repeated; I sighed as the formal dress irritated my skin again

Your hair, Emily giggled suddenly.

I know, I replied.

It was flat on one side- apparently extremely funny as I attempted to fix it up in the mirror.

Emily laughed as I only made the situation worse. I eventually got it.

_I wish I was older, Emily announced suddenly. _

I didn't know how to reply to that.

John?

Mmmh.

What?

I'm acknowledging you.

Ooh. I want to be older because I wanna drive a car, go out for dinner by myself, drink alcohol, play computer all day, and get a boyfriend, andâ€¦|.

That was too personal, wasn't it? She said sheepishly.

Yes. It was.

Sometime later

John

I shook Daniel Lazlo's hand stiffly, yet gently. Breaking his hand wasn't the best idea. The small stuffy room was not a comfortable size, with Sarah and Lasky squeezed in. There weren't any windows either, so I couldn't see the hot gasses, nebulae and stars that swirled around in space. Thomas smiled; all the Spartans, marines, ODSs, and other crew had passed the inspection. Daniel seemed satisfied and marched importantly out the door. I turned my gaze onto Lasky, tilting my head ever so slightly as I considered what to say.

"_I did not like him."_

"_None of us did. They get worse every year," Lasky agreed._

Sarah rolled her eyes.

"_John one one seven, dismissed," she ordered._

I pressed the button on the wall and the door slid open with a pneumatic hiss. ODSs lurked outside, glaring- not unusual, but this time they'd remarkably scored just under the marines. Of course, they blamed everyone and everything but themselves. I glanced disinterestedly at them. I didn't care, and it was not my place to.

"_John!" _

I slowed my pace and let Linda catch up.

"_How did we score?"_

I turned to look _a__t her._

"_We failed, miserably."_

_Linda's emerald green eyes rolled. _

"_We won by miles," I finished. I looked down as my boots squeaked on the polished floor- remnants of the inspection._

"_I suppose I should not be surprised," Linda pondered, "But then, of course, we win at everything."_

I narrowed my eyes.

"_Not everything," I said sternly._

John? Emily began.

Yes?

When do you think I'll come to your world again?

I gazed down the long, polished grey corridor. It wasn't too far from here to the hangar- my intended destination. I was to examine Blue Team's new pelican; I hadn't seen it yet. I smiled wryly, I usually stole the dropships when I needed them.

I don't understand that, I replied to Emily.

_Well- your world is way more fun than mine, plus it has _space ships_ forcrissake! _

It's also dangerous, unpredictable and you could die, I pointed out.

I shook my head and Linda glanced up- I wasn't worried, Blue Team knew about the link.

_I cannot always be around to protect you, and I can't protect you from everything. _

_That admission hurt me. All I'd ever done _was_ protect, kill, lose, regain. I'd never failed. And yetâ€¦I just could not do that with whatever the Light had in mind._

_I blinked. Enough. _

No wonder Blue team had been given the dropship. The space craft was beat up; paint chipped, metal dented and bent. I gave the derelict space craft another disgusted glance- give it half a chance and something would fail and kill us all. I gave Kelly a look and she returned it. Fred examined the Pelican. Numerous dropships also sat on raised pedestals, poised for take-off at the slightest need, the huge hangar having exit tunnels ejecting from the Infinity's side. I didn't look at the gigantic lights on the ceiling; they were so bright they'd burn out my retinas. I leaned against the olive green ship as Fred emerged from the troop bay.

"_I am no engineer, but this will not fly," he announced, slightly miffed at the oil and dirt in his short brown hair. Kelly kicked the Pelican in anger._

"_I can't believe it!"_

"_Maybe I could be o' assistance?" a ridiculously accented American voice sounded behind us, and every Spartan whirled to face the intruder. A woman about thirty-two, wearing spotless navy blue overalls and brown working boots stood behind us, twirling her non-regulation length, free blonde hair. I fixed her with a reserved gaze._

"_We're fine, thank you very much," spat Kelly angrily._

I wished she could shut her mouth. This might be our lucky break. Fred eyed the civilian engineer passively, her job identified by her name tag. Linda didn't even look up from her polishing, cleaning her sniper's scope lens studiously.

"_Identify yourself," I commanded, but the engineer pushed past me. I turned my head to follow her progress over to the Pelican, the mysterious woman flinging words over her shoulder._

"_You've checked mer name tag, haven't ya? Amanda Jones, A-class civilian engineer. Ya can call me Amy, if yer like. I don't care much in tha' names department."_

_Fred turned a clueless gaze onto me. I didn't look back, only

narrowing my eyes and continuing to burn a hole into Amanda's back, which she seemed to either not notice, or notice and ignore. She jogged into the Pelican's troop bay with a flick of blonde hair. I stalked curiously over and peered inside as the engineer attempted to pull a maintenance panel off the wall, but the thick grey battleplate wouldn't budge. Amanda shot me a look._

"_Help me out here! I know you Spartans are strong as anythin, and if yer want yer Pelican fixed, you gotta cut me some slack, help out ya know?"_

I cocked my head to the side.

"_Who sent you?"_

"_Oh, no one. I can just tell when somethins outta whack, and with the state of this critter, I coulda told from a mile away," she replied as I ripped the panelling off the wall, the metal emitting a loud screech which hurt my hears; I ignored it._

Amanda gestured around.

"_What we have here is a case of neglect, an poor servicing, the poor thing goes through a kinda vicious cycle- one engineer can't fix it, he ruins something, passes it on an it repeats," she explained as she fiddled with wires._

"_Eventually tha craft in question is either scrapped, or ends up in tha hands of someone who can fix her," she said, standing up and putting her hands on her hips, "In this case, I'll be tha one ta fix her. It ain't gonna be easy an I'm not gonna sugar coat it for ya."_

She dusted off her hands and examined the inside of the Pelican, finally looking at me.

"_I heard about you Spartan twos when I signed up fer tha Infinity; ya seem pretty bad ass. Of course, I don't know much about yer besides what yer done and yer reputation."_

_I didn't comment. She cocked an eyebrow and bent down to continue fiddling. _

"_Oh, she's an old one! Factory batch one three three four five seven, date of batch is twenty five twenty five. Geez! She was made just after Contact Harvest, when we first met-"_

She broke off as the wire she was tugging snapped, falling on her bottom.

"_The Covenant," I finished._

She turned her head and nodded solemnly. I helped her up off the floor and she blinked her thanks. She paused, turning to meet my eyes. I met her gaze evenly.

"_I do know wha' she did ta ya, though, that Halsey. Don't worry- I just know tha' you were six when she took ya and trained ya up."_

_I just continued to stare flatly at her, and she shook her head

ruefully._

"_Ya don't talk much, do ya? _

"_I find normal conversationâ€¦difficult," I replied._

Amanda brushed some dirt and dust off of my medals and formal dress, and I gave her a questioning glance. She grinned.

"_Ya wouldn't wanna get dirt 'n' dust in that pretty dress would ya?"_

I frowned at "pretty".

"_I find my current careâ€¦respectable," I said confusedly.

_

Amanda roared with laughter, surprising me.

"_Dontcha worry, we'll get this bird flyin in no time!"_

"_We?" I asked._

Two four hours later

Emily's house

Emily

I sat on my soft bed, the aqua and electric blue doona, decorated with white intersecting lines, under my back. I texted furiously on my newly acquired Iphone 3GS, my mother's old phone, but hey, at least it had Wi-Fi and an awesome app store! After a while, my eyes began to droop annoyingly; I was having a good conversation with my friend. I decided I'd check on John- sometimes the Spartan was doing something amazingly interesting that alleviated my boredom, but the guy's, well, "Spartan" attitude made some exciting things decidedly bland. I looked through John's eyes to see him watching a thirty year old blonde lady ask Fred some rather difficult questions, similar to,

"Whatcha do fer a living? Well, besides tha' usual killing, no offense intended."

Of course, the Spartan just looked blankly at her.

"Ever been on a date, big boy?" The woman said, turning to John and smiling smugly.

John's eyes widened and I could sense his confusion.

"Amandaâ€¦?"

Aha! So that was her name! She had a nice face and the kind of sweet looks that drew boys like flies to honey- but the outrageous accent kinda ruined the picture. I knew the Spartans weren't even the slightest affected by her prettiness, but then, even a singing Siren couldn't even affect them. They seemed to be working on a Pelican- was it Blue Team's? Fred blinked at Amanda and edged away slowly.

Kelly sniggered behind a hand, and Linda finally looked up, glaring straight across the pedestal to watch Amanda, the engineer wasn't even fazed. I'd be trembling on the ground, or cowering in a corner under that intense emerald green gaze. Amanda clapped her hands together.

"Well buddies, I think that's enough fer today! Toddle off now, but be back ere' tomorrow cause I've gotta work ya harder yet!

The civilian engineer strode down the pedestal's steps, taking them slowly and, for the obvious benefit of the marines who were everywhere in the hangar, swinging her hips in a certain way. It almost made me want to throw up. Luckily John had no idea what she was doing.

Hello, Emily.

Oh! Erâ€|Hello to you too, John.

Is there a reason for your intrusion?

Intrusion? I was only seeing what you were doingâ€|.

Then it's spying.

Shuddap! It is what it is and I say I was only checking what you were doing.

I am the senior officer. Do not tell me to shut up, John said mock seriously.

You're not the boss of me! I shot back playfully.

Since you take upon yourself the task of being stupid, I appointed myself to be your boss, he replied flatly.

I giggled.

Something funny? John asked, in a mock you're-in-trouble-tone.

Someone never graduated from high school!

That is very correct, he replied rapidly. I mentally whacked myself; of course he hadn't. He was being trained by Halsey when he was six. That thought didn't seem to bother me much anymore, even though that was what broke John.

Was your name Mr John Smarty Pants?

How should I know, he replied.

It wasn't a question, but a statement- of course he wouldn't know. He was brainwashed by the same training that'd turned him into a mindless killing machine.

"Blue Team dismissed," the Spartan announced. Fred, Kelly and Linda all turning swiftly and departing down the pedestal's stairs. John followed more slowly after. The Spartan strode slowly down a long corridor- probably to his room.

What was the Pelican for? I asked.

Blue Team's first Pelican. I don't know why they gave us one, he replied.

It looked pretty banged up!

It was worse when we started, he said ruefully.

The Spartan opened the door to his room and sat on his bed.

Honestly, why bother giving you the Pelican when you have to fix it? It should be combat ready or whatever, I scoffed.

John didn't reply, and didn't seem obliged to. I left the Spartan to his own devices.

I opened my body's eyes to meet grey, hominoid eyes staring at me. They were set in a white, humanoid face, the nose having no bridge. A grey crown thing swept back from the eleven foot tall alien's head, emblazoned with engraved circles. She- for it was most definitely a she - stood on some sort of small levitating platform that elevated her tall frame another two feet off the ground. She wore a tight grey dress that rippled slightly in a non-existent wind. The tip of her crown almost touched the ceiling.

I covered my mouth before I could scream, scrambling backwards and falling off the side of the bed. The Librarian? Why here? Why me? Why not John!

The Forerunner simply smiled, showing no teeth. She spoke.

"There is no need to be afraid, Propheted One."

Her voice wasn't alien- she sounded like an older woman, but the heavy, powerful tone was what gave the fact away. I scrambled backwards until I reached the wall and I hunched up. It didn't matter that I knew she wouldn't hurt me- I was afraid of what she was. The alien continued.

"You are very important, do you understand, Propheted One? The Reclaimer needs to keep you safe, and you will keep him safe in turn."

Reclaimer? John? No it couldn't..

"The object you call The Light will help you to do so."

I shivered, everything fading away until there was nothing but my terrified, paralysed mind screaming at me to run, _run. _I felt the warmth of The Light, but I didn't care what it, she-whatever, was doing. I wanted it out, out of my life! I felt myself fly forward into The Light.

But I didn't care. I protected myself in the only way I could; I blocked everything, my mind numb and blank.

UNSC Infinity

Emily

I didn't know how long I was in transit for. I had time to think about her. The Librarian. I shivered with fear as I remembered her. John mightn't have been scared in the events of Halo 4, but he wasn't six feet shorter than the Forerunner, and not thirteen years old.

I jumped with shock as I felt myself thrown out of The Light, landing on something scratchy. I instantly fastened a death grip on it, and I found that I'd landed face down over John's lap; I was gripping his arm.

"_Emily?" _The Spartan said in disbelief. He roughly lifted me upright and sat me down onto the metal floor. I didn't look up, tears searing my cheeks. Even now, I was still too scared to even say anything. I kept my death grip on John's neatly ironed dress coat cuffs, and I felt the muscles of his wrist working as he tried to free himself gently. I shivered, sniffing.

"Emily?" he repeated, sternly this time. He grabbed my jaw and lifted my head up to meet his concerned blue eyes. I stared dumbly into the piercing orbs, which narrowed at my blank expression.

"Shock," he said. In reply, I shivered and flinched away from his strong hand. I couldn't think of anything besides The Librarian. The worried Spartan took off his dress coat; the polished medals and ribbons removed, and put it over my shoulders. I picked absently at the rank patches on the sleeve, fraying the embroidery and dulling the bright gold of the chevrons. John didn't acknowledge my ruining of his patches. I stared at my jeans and my runners, seeing but not seeing. I straightened my blank pink shirt absentmindedly.

"_EMILY?"_ John said, louder this time. He lifted me up off the floor and I flopped against him numbly.

"You need medical attention. I don't know what put you into this state," he said, lifting me up into his arms effortlessly. I felt the world darken, and even through my hazy brain, I knew what was going to happen.

I fell unconscious.

Sometime later

UNSC Infinity

Emily

I cracked open my sore, swollen eyes and blinked, lubricating the dry spheres. I sat up slowly, the world foggy. Four pairs of eyes watched me intently- one emerald green, one a greyish blue, one a brown and the last, an unbelievable and startling icy blue. I rubbed my eyes to clear them, noticing my brain wasn't numb with fear and shutting down from shock. As I blinked, the faces came into focus and I noticed John was, ever so gently, touching my hand. Fred looked the most worried out of all of them, and Kelly was sympathetic. Linda polished her sniper rifle and didn't look up. I blinked under the combined force of the three Spartan's gazes and I looked down at the

hospital's white bed sheets. I couldn't feel the rough material of my jeans and I realised I was dressed in a dark green hospital gown. My hair had been re-done in a neater ponytail.

"Are you okay?" Fred asked.

I rolled my eyes.

"Considering I was recently scared out of my wits by an ancient Forerunner called The Librarian, and captured by her psycho husband the Didact, I'm fine, thanks! Oh, and you might think I'm crazy and stuff, but you gotta believe me, you know?"

John raised an eyebrow curiously.

"The Librarian?" He asked.

"Yâ€|yes," I squeaked under his intense gaze. Kelly couldn't sit still for any longer, and stood, pacing the room. Linda looked up suddenly and I met her eyes- their emerald green depths devouring me. I looked up at the ceiling, also avoiding John's prying eyes. Fred turned to the leader of Blue Team.

"It's time for your meeting with Lasky, John. You'll be late if you stay here any longer."

The Spartan sighed, standing abruptly. He looked at me.

"I'll be back," he said before he turned and exited out of the automatic door.

Kelly stopped pacing and gave me a look.

"What's this about The Librarian?"

I blanched as I remembered her face.

"Iâ€|I don't want to talk about it," I said nervously. She still scared the wits out of me.

"We need to know this," Fred said.

"N..No! I don't want to talk about it and I won't."

Kelly's eyebrows lowered in barely contained irritation, and she bent, sticking her nose into my face and rudely spraying droplets of spit as she spoke.

"We have other methods besides _asking_."

I shrunk back.

Fred didn't comment. I'd had enough of their stares and Kelly's threats. I threw away the bed's crisp white sheets, made sure my hospital gown was tied up, and slammed the button to open the door. Fred whipped around and watched me, but for some strange reason, didn't make a move to stop my angered escape. I heard shouts and quickened my angry paces into a run. My bare feet slapped on the cold white floor of the medical halls, and I looked desperately for somewhere to hide. I needed to get my anger out. I couldn't keep

running all over Infinity, eventually someone would catch me; but right now that seemed to be the only viable option- who knows, maybe I might find some secluded place to drown my anger. I raced out of the hallway, straight smack into a busy corridor of the Infinity, instantly almost getting trampled by a Spartan Four decked out in full armour. He gave me an incredulous stare, his dark brown eyes confused. I rushed past, ignoring him. I ran and ran and ran until I was sure my lungs would burst and my legs would collapse. I noticed the hallways got less and less crowded, and the lights grew less bright. The air began to smell different, too- but in ways I couldn't explain. I saw some huge pipes, their ends opening into something I could crawl inside. There was one near the floor, and I bent and pulled myself inside. It smelt odd, like fuel and plants mixed together, but I didn't care. As long as it kept me hidden, that was fine by me. The pipe didn't continue back as far as I'd hoped. It sloped upwards after about three meters, into a vertical tube. I saw the rivets and bolts, the joints and the connectors, and thought maybe I could possibly pull myself up. I reached up to grab a joint, positioning my feet on a huge bolt. I pulled myself up, reaching for another bolt, and shifting my feet onto the joint that my hands were just on. I continued upwards in that fashion, and I knew that one mistake, one fall and it would all be over. Strangely, I didn't feel scared like I knew I should. I felt resigned to the fact, like it wasn't even going to happen. Finally, the pipe returned to horizontal and I collapsed on my stomach. Then I noticed that there was some sort of see through patch; I could see the corridor where I'd entered the pipe. I felt a rush of fear- if someone happened to walk through and look up– I calmed my breathing and let my fluttering heart rest, wouldn't do to hyperventilate and fall unconscious. No-one had come along here since I'd fled to this area. I didn't know where I was. I crawled further along the pipe, over the corridor and searched around the walls of the tube. This could be a maintenance pipe or something, so there'd have to be a route plan or something, wouldn't there? Eventually, the pipe darkened so I couldn't see. Still, I crawled on. I wouldn't let my legs and arms fall asleep.

Suddenly, there was nothing under them. I screamed as I fell through the murk, my hands and knees scraping the sides of the pipe painfully. I felt myself land painfully on something, and I was sure I heard something crack. I felt no sting and fire of a broken bone, though, so I pulled myself up. Something soft crunched under my hands and there was still no light. I stood, straightening out my soft hospital gown. I wandered around, feeling the walls which were the smooth metal of the Infinity's corridors. I felt around until I was sure I touched something like a light switch. I fumbled with it until the lights flashed on with extreme intensity, blinding me. I closed my eyes and waited until they grew used to the light. I opened them to see trash bags, boxes, weird containers and all sorts of things- but they all pointed to one thing: Trash. Where'd trash go on a space ship? Through an airlock, or crushed into recyclable stuff, at least that's what I'd see from the movies and tv shows I'd watched over the years. I wanted to get out, I didn't think sitting in a room full of stinking trash was particularly pleasant.

But, I gulped as I realised what was under the floor, peeking out through slightly bent metal floor plates.

Giant metal teeth.

Perfect for smashing up other bits of metal and boxes.

And probably, unfortunate little girls, too.

Near the hospital

John

"_Not here!" Sarah bellowed as she looked around. Thomas Lasky raced around the corner, skidding to a stop in front of me. His brown hair was messed up and his eyes were worried._

"_We've looked everywhere," he said, "I don't understand, she should stick out like a sore thumb; yet no one has seen her recently."_

"_Keep looking," I said sternly. I switched my gaze to Sarah, "Chances are, she'll get hurt, or do something stupid."_

They both turned and hurried away. Everyone had checked all over the Infinity, besides the trash level. That's where I'd head. It was the perfect, quiet place for a drugged up, scared, and angry child. At least, that was what I thought. I reached out with my mind to see if I could find Emily that way, but I couldn't detect anything and decided she'd already blocked her thoughts and rendered her mind invisible to my probing. I stalked silently down the Infinity's corridors, towards the place that I hoped a silly child had hidden.

In the trash disposal

Emily

There was nothing in the room to help me, there was a dark patch in one wall- I decided it must be some sort of one sided window. It was too high for me to reach and attempt to smash in, so I ruled that out. The rest of the room was hexagonal, the walls a light green. I reached out with my mind, trying to reach John, but something was blocking me and I couldn't extend my thoughts out. They whiplashed back, and they_ hurt_. I cried out and toppled into a huge box. I jumped in surprise as a chute above my head opened for a split second, and plastic bags and more boxes tumbled down next to me. There was a white line on the wall, and I had a feeling when the trash in the room reached it, the floor would open and release the rubbish that had accumulated, to be crushed by the powerful and sharp metal teeth underneath. My brain still reeled from the force of my thoughts ricocheting back. John was my only hope; but now I couldn't even reach him. I regretted my flight from the hospital- why hadn't I just waited for John, told the Spartans of Blue Team about the Librarian? I didn't know. I gulped nervously as another chute released more rubbish, one box rising perilously close to the line on the wall. I threw out my thoughts, strongly towards the one-sided glass. I didn't meet any resistance there, but I knew instantly there wasn't anyone behind the black glass. There didn't need to be, anyway. The trash system was fully automatic. I hurled my thoughts relentlessly at the barrier stopping me from reaching John, and I thought, maybe, just maybe, one of my thoughts had penetrated because I didn't feel the pain of it being forced back. There were a few faint replies, barely whispers. I recognised the strong timbre of John's voice, worried, and I thought I could detect fear in the faint tone.

Emilyâ€|. Hurtâ€|. ? Emilyâ€| Whereâ€|. Where areâ€|.

They were cut off abruptly as the floor groaned, opening slowly. I yelped as I heard the metal teeth began to gnash a few small boxes that had fallen early to their peril. I scrambled to the edge of the room, far away from the grinding teeth as possible. The floor continued to recede, revealing more teeth, and I now knew that the whole floor was filled with them. Just as the room had been designed so every single piece of trash was chewed up, it offered no chance for escape for me. John would be too late now, even if he knew I was here. I cried out with my mind, for what I thought was the last time.

John! Help me!

But now, I got a strong reply.

Where are you? Emily? Tell me!

I must have screamed in my mind as one of my shoes nearly fell to the great gnashing teeth, for I felt a wave of John's strange fear wash over me. It didn't feel like normal fear, and I could find no words to describe it. The floor continued to recede; now there was barely one meter left.

I'm in some sort of trash compactor! It's going to chew me up! I shrieked.

There are hundreds of those! John cried.

There it was, undoubtedly. The Spartan was scared, and if he was, I should be too. I felt my legs freeze as they imagined the pain the teeth would create as they crushed them. I looked around for something that would set the compactor apart from the others, a number, anything. Then I saw it, my eyes sharpened from the fear racing through my body. Two numbers, tiny, printed on the opposite wall. Zero eight. Zero eight!

John! Zero eight! I'm in zero eight! I screamed through the link as the floor receded to a mere forty centimetres.

Hold on! He replied.

I scrunched my legs up to my chest, my flimsy hospital gown almost getting caught in the teeth.

Twenty.

Fifteen.

The teeth crushed boxes and rubbish mere centimetres away.

Ten.

I closed my eyes, tears burning my face. What a way to die, being crunched and gnashed by a garbage compactor. I waited.

But nothing happened. No pain of my bones being crushed, no blood spurting from my ruptured arteries and veins. My pounding heart made

me feel faint. I opened my eyes to see the teeth had stopped, and the floor had stopped, too- a mere eight centimetres away from my hunched body. I reached out a foot on a closed metal jaw; it looked like the jowls of a dragon. I stood on it, jumping in surprise as the one sided window was smashed with a powerful kick. I swayed on my feet, the experience dizzying me. I fell, but not to the floor. I fell into John's arms, which wrapped me into a hug; The Spartan lifted me up, and I felt the roughness of his slight stubble- John was always clean shaven. I let my tears soak into his shirt.

"I thought I'd lost you," he said.

I didn't reply. The Spartan let me down, making sure I didn't collapse. He kneeled, looking me in the eye. His expression was one of the strange fear I'd felt from him earlier, but now it faded. I sniffed, wiping away the tears from my face.

"You saved me," I stated, still shocked.

"Of course," he replied.

I looked at the metal teeth under my feet.

"I couldn't reach you earlier. I don't know why," I murmured.

"I couldn't find you, either and that made it harder. I didn't know if you were dead or hurt orâ€¦" he broke off awkwardly. He wasn't used to showing this much emotion.

Fresh tears pushed themselves through my ducts and I looked up at John, and he turned his head away for a moment.

"I was scared I couldn't save you," he said bluntly, "Scared that I would fail in the worst way," he said, finally looking me in the eye. He turned to look at the smashed glass of the window.

"We need to go. Now. I don't know how long the override lasts for."

He beckoned me over to the wall, bending and forming a cup with his hands.

"You go first. Don't touch the glass; you'll cut your hands."

I stepped into the cup, and he pushed me up and over the sharp edges of glass that remained after his entrance. I fell to the floor with an oof, in a control room. A few monitors stood around, a red flashing text saying "Manual Override" covering the technical data and HUDs. I heard a grunt, and John simply jumped high enough to go over the sharp blades of glass.

"Are you hurt?" he asked me.

"Noâ€¦No. Well, if you hadn't saved me, I wouldn't be hurt; I'd be a pile of blood and bones in a recycled plastic cube. Not to mention, dead."

John's face contorted in a strange expression.

"Don't say that."

"Say what?"

"What would have happened if I hadn't saved you."

He looked at me solemnly.

"I can't stand the thought of you dead because I failed."

I couldn't find anything to reply with, so I just gave the Spartan a hug.

"I need to take you back. Thomas has almost ripped his hair out by its roots looking for you," he said, all serious again.

Hospital Room 108^

Emily

"You almost got crushed by a _trash compactor?"_ Sarah said disbelievingly as a doctor injected something into my arm. I winced at the sharp pain.

"Thank God for the link. If it hadn't been for it, I'd probably be plastic cutlery now. I don't fancy myself as a fork," I said, giving my saviour, who leaned against the wall, a thankful look. He blinked at me.

Of course, Thomas and Sarah knew about my strange and somewhat hampering connection with the Spartan Two, but now it wasn't hampering at all. It'd saved my life. The doctor interrupted my thoughts.

"This is just a drug to help with shock and the aches and pains that occur after such experiences."

"When I fell into the trash compartment, I couldn't see when I fell, but I didn't really feel scared for some reason. Was that another drug?"

"Yes, administered earlier while you were passed out from shock," he replied, and I winced as he removed the needles from my arm.

Sarah shook her head, her armour's servos whirring softly.

"You're the luckiest kid I've ever laid eyes on."

"It wasn't luck. It was John," I replied indignantly.

Sarah looked at the clock on the wall.

"I have to go and join Lasky. He's prepping the War Games for the Spartans, due in a day or so."

And with that, she exited with a flourish. The doctor followed suit. John's blue eyes opened slightly and he watched me intently.

"Please don't sit there and watch me like a hawk," I said sternly to the Spartan.

He continued to watch me passively, and I rolled my eyes.

"I just looove you staring at me. It makes me feel so safe. Like, you know, I'm about to be eaten by a lion." I said sarcastically.

The Spartan only quirked an eyebrow and closed his eyes again.

"You don't have to stay there."

This time, he opened his eyes and gave me a look which said "You've got no choice, so put up with it."

I didn't know John could have such a stubborn and cocky personality; he'd only shown some humour and smugness, and a great deal of seriousness, but never these kinds of emotions. I decided that me almost dying had messed with his brain. He'd probably snap out of it.

"Are you crazy?" I asked him.

Still with his eyes closed,

"I don't believe so," he replied flatly.

"When can I get up and walk around?"

He finally leaned away from the wall, uncrossed his arms and stalked over to the end of my bed. He leaned over me, mock seriously, said,

"When I say so."

"When's that?" I teased him.

It seemed largely ineffective as he stalked back over to the corner and leant against it again.

"When I say."

"When's that?"

"When I decide when."

"How long until you decide when?"

"I don't know."

"How can you not know? You just said you decide when," I continued my relentless barrage of annoying, and difficult questions.

"I don't know when I'll decide when, and when I do, I'll let you know," he said, completely crushing any other alternatives to fight back with. In a flash, he'd turned the conversation to his favour. He'd known exactly what he was doing the entire time. I opened and closed my mouth, finally settling for a supremely annoyed glare which had no effect whatsoever on his smug expression.

"Where's Kelly and Fred, Linda too?"

"They have important tasks."

"That's so descriptive!" I said sarcastically.

"Perhaps that is all that I need to describe," he replied.

I felt around in the pocket of my jeans, finding my Ipod. I'd changed back into my normal clothes after John had brought me back to the hospital. I'd forgotten that the little Ipod Nano 7th gen had been in my pocket, and I was lucky that the thin lightweight music player hadn't bent. Out came the earphones, which I sniffed at with slight disgust- there was earwax on them, as they went right into my ears. I reminded myself that I should clean my ears; clean ears, no wax on earphones. John still kept his eyes closed, and before I stuck the tiny speakers into my ear, he spoke.

"Amanda will be coming, soon."

"Why? She doesn't even know me."

"The whole Infinity knows about you, Emily."

"Whoa. Really?"

"Amanda also said she was looking forward to having you help with the repair of the Pelican."

"Why would I want to work on that thing? Your Pelican, your responsibility," I scoffed.

"You're my responsibility, so my responsibilities are your responsibilities," he said.

"Since when was I your responsibility?" I asked incredulously.

"Since you decided to get yourself into a trash compactor."

"That was not my fault."

He finally opened his eyes and raised both his eyebrows at me.

"Whose was it then? Mine?"

"Yeah!" I said haughtily.

"Tell me, what part did I play?"

I just stared at him. Then I stuffed my earphones in and blasted techno music through them. John's eyes immediately narrowed and he gave me a look.

"Don't tell me! You can hear it?" I yelled accidentally; I couldn't tell how loud I was. He nodded, and I paused the track.

"How well?" I asked him.

"Well enough," and he would tell me nothing more. I ripped my earphones out and glared at him.

"If you want me to turn it off, say so!"

"Hey ya'll! How's it crackin?" Amanda's cocky voice sounded from in the hallway. She stuck her face in through the door, and peered around. She beamed when she saw me. John didn't move, and the door opened with a flourish, Amanda stepped in, tossing her long blonde hair. The engineer still wore her dirty navy blue overalls.

"So ya the little time travellin kid I've heard so much 'bout?"

"Erâ€|Yeah," I replied hesitantly.

John smirked slightly at my awkward behaviour.

Shut up, I told him mentally; but his smirk only grew.

Amanda rushed forward, and pinched my cheeks.

"Ya need some food in ya belly! You're so thin! I heard you almost gotcha self crushed by some trash thing! Must have been scary, little darling!"

"It was pretty scary. I'm lucky John saved me."

The afore- mentioned Spartan's lips twitched in the ghost of a smile.

"I've heard all about ya adventures with the guy! Ya got some telepathic thing, huh?"

I was amazed at how easily information like that was leaked- I hadn't even known Amanda knew, and judging by the look on John's face, he hadn't either.

"Errâ€|Yeah."

"Show me! I wanna see if these rumours a' true!"

I don't like her very much, I sent to John dejectedly.

You'll get used to her, he replied.

"Well? Whatcha say?" Amanda asked.

"Emily said that she really likes you," John replied.

I was going to kill him later.

"Awww, thanks lil' darling! Now, we've gotta get some food for ya! Ya need that lil' belly to be full before we work on the Pelican!"

Now you can get up, John thought to me smugly.

Someday, I'm going to beat the stuffing out of you, I shot back.

Good luck, he replied.

I glared at him and he only offered me a reserved look in

return.

On The Way To Emily's Quarters

John

Emily staggered erratically, her belly swollen. Amanda had stuffed her to the brim, with chicken, potatoes, and all sorts of things that the Infinity's canteen could churn out. I'd eaten a good amount myself- but not enough to turn me into a stumbling, groaning idiot. I laughed mentally as Emily almost smashed into the wall.

"_I can't believe Amanda is going to make me work on that Pelican in an hour," she groaned._

"_Can I go to your room instead?" she asked._

"_Why?"_

"_Because it's closer, that's why!"_

_I shook my head in dismay. _

"_Don't throw up on my floor; you'll be cleaning it up."_

John's Quarters

Emily

I flopped onto the Spartan's bed, my stomach aching horribly. I remember John's amused expression in the canteen, when Amanda had stuffed spoonful after spoonful of food into my mouth. He'd not made a move to help me at all. I felt the Spartan grab me by the collar and drop me onto the chair by his desk.

"Hey!" I said in dismay. He took the spot on the bed where I'd just been sitting, and gave me one of his "deal with it" looks. I folded my arms, and the Spartan Two gave me a deprecating look.

"I'm happy that you're in my world, Emily," the Spartan announced suddenly.

"Under these circumstances, I think this meeting is different on many levels," I said, attempting to copy John's perfect, measured speech and humour. He merely gave me a weird look.

"Don't try to copy me, for your jokes will fall short and your life will end from embarrassment."

I blew a wisp of my honey blonde hair out of my face and swivelled on the desk chair.

"Well, hello there Mister Smarty Pants. Please don't play your mind games or I may be forced to slap you."

"I am not playing any games. That is, unless you'd like to."

I stopped swivelling on the chair and gave him a withering look.

"You're going to do it anyway, aren't you?"

"I have done nothing."

I attempted to stare the Spartan down, but as always John's unblinking, impenetrable gaze won out. I looked at the floor.

"I don't know why the Librarian came to me, if that's what you want to know. I'm not special, I'm just an ordinary kid," I said, letting my hair out of its ponytail and twirling it, "No matter how you put it, it all comes back to the fact that I'm, well, nothing. I'm not important, rich, particularly talented heck, I can't even handstand! It doesn't make any sense. Why me?"

The super soldier across the room regarded me, listening to my outburst.

"The things that you have done may be the cause," he replied.

"What have I done? I haven't _saved _anyone. I've mostly been saved myself."

The Spartan became intensely interested in his boots for a moment.

"What you've done to me."

I blinked at his meaning. Of course I'd changed the Spartan; he was more human now, more emotional, and more _fun._

"Well, yeah, I guess changing someone as important to the galaxy as you could be a kind of reason."

Some sort of timer chimed seemingly from nowhere, and I jumped involuntarily.

"Do I really have to work on the Pelican?" I whined.

"Yes," John replied firmly.

I dragged my bottom off the chair, deliberately knocking a pile of papers from John's desk to punish him- but the Spartan shot across the room and grabbed them, in exactly the order they were before. He set them back on his desk and turned to raise an eyebrow.

"Don't bother knocking things over. Sudden movements only make me react faster."

I ignored him and pushed past, dragging my feet dejectedly. I wasn't looking forward to working on the damn Pelican!

Launch Pedestal 0591

Emily

"She's gotta 'lil' more work left on 'er, and by that I mean heaps more 'n' I aint cutting yers any slack. Even the primmed princess of perfectville is gonna join in," Amanda smirked, throwing a sly glance at me. I blanched at the thought of getting grease and grime..and ughâ€|in my precious hair. Amanda roared with laughter at my

disgusted expression.

"Don't ya worry! It'll be heapsa fun!"

"More like heapsa torture," I scoffed quietly.

Fred gave me a rueful glance.

Thomas Lasky's Office

Thomas Lasky

"_Every time that kid comes here, the Infinity deviates from its course," an engineer explained, "as the engines are Forerunner- it's safe to say the interference is Forerunner, too. The momentary deviation of the engines from their normal operations may seem harmless, but really it's causing damage to internal parts as the disturbance violently reverses and changes electrical fields and magnetic coils."_

"_Is it life threatening?" I asked._

The engineer shuffled his boots and looked away for a moment.

"_Potentially. That is, if the child keeps coming here."_

I arranged some notes on my desktop and filed them into the drawer in my classic twenty first century desk; even off duty there was still work to be done.

"_Some parts that need to be replaced and the repairs that need to be completed can only be done at a major space port, sir. Our options at this point are still limited; we can hold her together but we can't fix her."_

The engineer seemed dead on his feet- he'd obviously been supervising the premature repairs on the engines. I waved a hand distractedly as I read a file.

"_You've earned a rest. I'll assign another engineer to your shift."_

"_Yes sir, thank you sir," the engineer said gratefully as he hurried out of the small, stuffy room. I shook my head ruefully. The mightiest weapon in the UNSC's arsenal was falling apart because of a twelve year old girl and a light- the irony was almost bordering on ridiculous. I looked up as Sarah stalked in. _

"_Yes?"_

"_Cut the attitude, you know I always visit," she retorted against my disinterested tone. I looked up and clasped my hands together, giving her a sceptical look._

"_So what'd the engineer have to say?"_

"_It's as we feared, Emily's the cause of the damage, but now we know it's almost definitely the Librarian from John's guess, that she controls the light."_

Sarah paced.

"_We can't exactly stop the Librarian from taking her or bringing her or whatever. We could kill her, but that's unreasonable and stupid. Not to mention morally wrong, and I don't think it would go down too well with John."_

I raised an eyebrow at the copper haired Spartan.

"_Too well? He would hunt whoever did it down and kill them. Be it a Spartan commander or a space ship commander, he wouldn't stop."_

Sarah snorted, and shifted in her armour.

"_I think Halsey went overkill with those twos. I mean- six years old? Come on. That's unethical."_

"_Sarah, they're a great asset. They aren't machines, no matter how much it may seem like it, and you can tell perfectly from John and Emily," I corrected her._

Launch Pedestal 0591

Emily

I examined the dirt and grease under my nails and ran a hand through my ponytail, feeling the sticky grime and sweat encrusted in the golden strands. I screwed up my nose in disgust. I leant against the Pelican; my arms ached and there was a painful lump on my head where I'd bumped it on a bulkhead. I closed my eyes, but I soon felt four gazes trained on me and I cracked open a dry, irritated eye. Every Spartan on Blue Team regarded me with blank expressions, John far by the most stoic. Amanda leapt out of the troop bay and waltzed in front of them, tossing her blonde hair.

"She's still got some work- but otherwise ya all doin' good," she said, with wink at Fred; I rolled my eyes at the Spartans expression as it changed from blank to miffed and confused.

"Pleaaaaaase tell me we're done?" I begged.

"Yeah, go off on ya interstellar adventures wi' this guy," she said, slapping John on the shoulder. He watched her intently with an unreadable expression. Amanda tutted a finger.

"But come back here tomorrow, or ya'll be in fer a world a pain," she smirked at me, toying with her blonde hair. John switched his gaze to me, and I still couldn't read the expression.

"What are you looking at?" I demanded. He didn't reply, but he looked away obediently. I turned my back on the Spartans and Amanda, forced my sore legs to work, and strode across the pedestal. I reached the steps and stumbled down them; none of the Spartans followed and I guessed they were probably discussing the Pelican with Amy. I made my way across the hangar and past other pedestals, heading to the dormitories. The gigantic hangar dwarfed anything I'd ever seen- a Pelican whooshed over my head as it lined up to fly through an exit tunnel. A smaller craft moved itself in position to land on a

pedestal, I'd seen it before in Halo 4- it was an F-41 Broadsword. It had medium length wings, which curved slightly forwards and had tips that swept slightly upwards. Small, stubby stabilising fins created the tail, which blended into the body; there was two horizontal on either side, and one small vertical fin which extended underneath the space craft. The nose and cockpit screen was like that of a fighter jet, except the nose was more rounded and larger. The small craft extended small black wheels and touched down on the pedestal with such gentleness, it seemed like it weighed nothing. I wanted to get a closer look- this thing was waaaay cooler than that dumb Pelican, and plus, I wanted to meet the pilot of such an awesome thing. I hurried over to the steps on the base of the Broadsword's pedestal, taking a moment to straighten my shirt, untangle some of my hair and pick out some dirt from under my nails. I probably didn't have permission to do any of this, but it seemed like I could get away with a few things; I'd take the risk. I rushed up the stairs and out onto the platform, almost colliding with the pilot.

I halted suddenly and looked up into a pair of sparkling greenish blue eyes, holding intelligence much like John's, but kinder, friendlier. I flushed with surprise and didn't say hello, looking at the man's polished black boots.

"Hello? Are you the time travelling girl? You must be, because there have never been any children aboard besides you," he said in a thick accent, something I couldn't recognise. I looked up in surprise, taking in the man's face this time. He looked between twenty and thirty; there weren't many wrinkles on his face. He had short, spiky blonde hair, and his face was smoothly lined, with a sharp jaw and cheekbones. Again, the pilot's eyes startled me with their warm intelligence. The pilot wore some kind of G-suit, but not as bulky as my world's; his helmet was held under his arm, so I could see it had a hard light display for a HUD, and an insignia of two eagles fighting, both clutching lightning bolts and swords in their talons.

"Iâ€¦erâ€¦ Yeah, I am."

He smiled kindly.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Emily. I came here to look at your ship. I couldn't help myself, it looks so awesome!" I said, deciding to give him a compliment.

"Please to meet you, my lady," he said formally, kneeling and kissing my hand, "Thank you, my lady."

I giggled stupidly. My lady? I could get used to this.

"What's your name, oh charming pilot?" I said grandly.

"Henryk, at the ladies' service," he announced with a bow, "Would you like to see my fighter?" he asked.

"Of course!" I said, walking over to the spacecraft. It was about twenty meters long and had a wingspan of about nineteen. A step ladder allowed me to look into the cockpit. I gasped as I saw the fancy controls, none of the instruments recognisable to me. The blue

lights on the needles and dials glowed. The craft had smoother lines up close, the short wings curving very elegantly. I stepped down and smiled at Henryk, who returned it- but his was simply dazzling.

"Wow! Cool! If you don't mind me asking, what nationality are you? I think I recognise your accentâ€¦".

Henryk silenced my shy question with a wink.

"I like to be a man of mystery," and that was all he would say.

The Equivalent of Morning

Emily's Room

Emily

I smiled as I remembered Henryk's fabulous grin and smooth features. I still didn't know much about the guy- not his exact age, nor his last name, his nationality, nothing about his past and almost certainly nothing of his service record. The mysterious pilot's accent reminded me of something, although I couldn't put my finger on it. It wasn't a Russian accent, definitely not, it wasn't German. All I knew is that it sounded suspiciously European, but then again, accents could have changed in this world. American and Australian accents sounded the same, but then again they have been the only ones I've heard so far. I slithered out from under the bed sheets, grabbed my clothes and proceeded to shower. I'd probably have to work on the Pelican again, so I'd better prepare myself before I get the call.

Emily? John asked inside my head.

I squeaked in surprise and quickly closed my eyes so John wouldn't see anything.

Eeeeeeeeeeeek! JOHN!?

He totally ignored my squeal of surprise.

Who is Henryk?

Umâ€¦.He's this pilot I met yesterday when I went to see his Broadsword. That's his space craft. Since when have you cared? I asked irritably.

Since the Librarian has decided that I have to take care of you, he replied flatly.

I still don't understand your crazy mixed up Spartan motives. You're too weird for me to figure out; it's like a maze with octopus tentacles trying to tangle you up, you get somewhere and you just fail.

Thanks for the compliment, John replied sarcastically. Then he was gone.

A Few Minutes Later

Emily's Room

Emily

"Cortana! I don't want to work on the Pelican! D-O-N-T. I hate it."

The thirty centimetre tall, blue figure crossed her arms and flicked a strand of holographic black hair out of her eye; electrical circuit patterns flowed all over her body. Her hovering figure gave me a mock disappointed look.

"But, Henrykâ€¦".

I perked up.

"What?"

"He's coming to help out."

"Is he? Hang on! I gotta fix up my hair!" I said, charging back into the bathroom.

"You're not going on a date!" Cortana exclaimed from behind me.

"No, I'm not, but I still gotta look nice."

"Your hard work will just get messed up in five minutes," she commented.

I remembered my wiry greasy hair from before and I winced.

"Whatever. Let's go!" I said, flinging open the door and charging out into the busy corridor of the Infinity.

I arrived puffing and panting at the foot of Blue Team's Pelican launch pedestal. My legs ached from lactic acid, and my lungs felt like they'd burst. I sat down on the bottom step and started to recover. I heard footsteps and boots crossed in front of my line of vision, and I looked up to meet Henryk's kind eyes.

"A problem, my lady?"

I smiled exhaustedly.

"I can't make it up the steps, Henryk."

"Allow me, my lady," he said, and with that, I was hoisted into his arms with next to no effort. I giggled happily, going limp to let my legs recover from running all over the Infinity. Henryk smelt fresh, like soap; I blinked as I inhaled the strange scent. Henryk wore something akin to what John wore- the long sleeved grey shirt and long black pants, and the same coloured boots. However, Henryk's didn't look like they'd been polished for an hour straight, and my thoughts of John being overkill was clearly proved. The pilot started up the steps and in no time we were crossing the top of the pedestal to the waiting Pelican. Amanda wasn't there yet for some reason, and I hoped desperately that I could get out of working on the Pelican. Henryk set me down in front of John.

"Your charge, sir," he said, slightly sarcastically. John just blinked once, very slowly. Henryk again, took my hand and kissed it.

"Were my services suitable, my lady?"

I giggled.

"Yes, Henryk," I said, shooting a look-what-I've-got glance at John. I thought I saw them roll, just slightly. Linda tapped the side of the Pelican suggestively.

"The seats in the troop bay, we have to remove them. Amanda told us yesterday, because she wasn't going to be here. She's got a meeting in Engineering," the Spartan sniper announced.

I turned curiously to Henryk.

"Why are you here anyway?"

He smiled bedazzlingly.

"Amanda saw us yesterday and decided I may like to help you work," he replied in his strange, lilting accent, "For whatever reason, I'm not sure why she asked me."

I smiled up at the pilot. He was tall, but not as tall as John, probably a few inches shorter. I stalked dejectedly over to the back of the Pelican and peered inside, gaping as I noted the amount of seats to take out. Fifteen! Fifteen seats! Suddenly, I felt a looming presence behind me and I whirled around, smacking straight into John. I stepped back, rubbing my nose. The Spartan's muscles were rock hard, as usual. John looked down at me, but didn't apologize.

"Don't sneak up behind people," I said angrily, and the Spartan's icy blue eyes seemed to show his assent. Henryk's voice sounded behind me.

"There are six bolts on each chair, three to fix the base to the ground, and another three to fix the headrest to the wall. Each bolt _should_ take around five to ten minutes to remove," Henryk explained in his weird accent.

"Oh, just great. Kill me now, please."

Henryk turned me around gently and smiled his brilliant white smile.

"I'll be glad to lend my services to the lady again, if she likes," he said formally.

I giggled.

I'm sure I heard some of the Spartans sigh.

A Few Hours Later

War Game Prep Room

John

"_You all know how the system works, you know the maps, the weapons, the vehicles, but this time it's different! There will be no armour shields, and no ammo pickups. You will spawn with the gun you choose and the ammo in the clip shall be the only ammo you will get!" Sarah announced, "There will be no motion detectors, no night vision! You'll be equipped with a knife, so if you run out of bullets you can still defend yourself with a weapon. ETA to start, one hour. Get yourself ready, Spartans!"_

_Kelly rolled her eyes. _

"_She always acts like she's in charge. Really, it's the people she calls "egg heads" that are in charge," she commented. Fred examined his assault rifle, "I'm looking forward to kicking her butt," he said._

"_Not before me, you don't," I replied. _

Fred smiled a little, "Looks like I'll have to get rid of you, too."

"_Good luck with that," Linda said as she absent-mindedly polished her sniper rifle lens. I gave Fred a superior look, and he raised an eyebrow._

"_We shall see," he said._

Thirty Minutes Later

Near the Armoury

Emily

"Wow Henryk! You're amazing!"

The handsome pilot smiled, his greenish blue eyes glittering with the praise.

"Thank you, my lady," he replied.

I giggled and slapped him on the shoulder. No one had ever treated me with the respect that Henryk did, or called me "lady". Usually, and very rarely, it was just "miss". I looked up as Sarah Palmer strode towards us, her coppery red hair tied in a bun which was tucked into the neck of her tight black undersuit. She was in full armour, too and I knew the power that she now had. She slowed her stride.

"There's a War Game about to commence, if either of you would want to watch from the viewing room," she said, pointing in the direction we were heading, "Right down the end. Blue Team will be participating. Just one of those Spartans can take down a whole squad of us, the bastards," she finished, continuing her heavy armoured walk. Henryk turned to me.

"I think we'll find John quite entertaining, don't you think?"

I nodded enthusiastically.

"I should think so, Henryk!"

One Hour and a Half Later

Viewing Room 1BA2

Emily

It was like watching a battlefield, but from above. You could use the screens in front of you to switch camera views on different Spartans, because it was a lot like a computer game- but a whole lot more real. War Games were a virtual world created by computers, and I wasn't exactly sure how it worked. The Spartans could die in the simulation, but they wouldn't actually die. Apparently the Spartans were hooked up to a machine which scanned their armour and body and used the information to create an "avatar". The Spartans were immobile while they were hooked up, the machine reading brain impulses to tell the avatar where to move. Right now, only Fireteam Majestic, comprising of Gabriel Thorne, Paul Demarco, Carlo Hoya, Anthony Madsen and Tedra Grant remained. Of the Spartans of Blue team only John remained, the other members had glitched out for some unknown reason, and I knew that that Kelly, Fred and Linda were probably taking off their armour, fuming. Sarah was still in the game, by herself. I flicked the screen, switching the camera view to John. Up came the familiar orange visor, and the olive green armour. He somehow, moved silently, and almost amazingly, blended into the wet, dense rainforest around him. The environment's namesake proved true, as droplets of water slid slowly down the Master Chief's visor.

It was hard to think of John being in that armour, now, so I made do with calling him that. I gaped in shock as I saw that Chief was barely five meters away from Palmer. I took stock of the fact that he had no ammo- he'd either have to use his fists or the deadly combat knife magnetically locked to his thigh.

"He's very good," Henryk commented in his strange accent.

"He was made to be. He could sneak up on you in a field of flat, dead grass and still scare you."

"He'll have to make his move soon."

The Spartan two had disconnected the knife swiftly and silently, moving slightly towards Sarah. Something must have tipped her off, for she looked up suddenly,

But in totally the wrong direction.

Fast as lightning, the Master Chief smashed into the commander, knocking her over with a shriek of crashing armour. The damp surroundings muffled the noise instantly.

"There you are!" Sarah spat through her helmet's speakers, as she vainly attempted to stop Chief's knife from ending her avatar's life. The tough undersuit of her armour was probably weaker at her neck, and I was pretty sure Chief knew it, too.

"Jesusâ€¦|So.. strong," Sarah growled angrily. There was nothing she could do that would stop the Spartan two from bringing the knife

closer, and closer still. The Master Chief stayed silent, the orange visor impenetrable, and Sarah struggled beneath the weight of him and his armour, but he was simply too heavy and too strong. I noticed Palmer's left hand sneaking down her side, and I finally saw the pistol attached to the magnetic hard point there. She braced her shoulder and elbow against a rock, using her right hand to slow the knife's progress towards her throat. She eased out the pistol, slowly, slowly-

Click.

The small weapon made a noise as it disconnected from the magnetic field. Chief moved, fast as a cheetah, wrenching it out of her hand and tossing it into the trees. With his other, he overwhelmed Sarah's grip on his knife, slashing it with immense power through the undersuit. I winced, waiting for the steady pulse of blood, and Sarah's dying gasps, but there was nothing. Sarah's avatar simply grew still. I glanced over at Thomas Lasky behind another screen- he was smiling and shaking his head.

"He gets her every time," he muttered quietly.

I smiled up at Henryk's spiky hair and friendly eyes, and he returned the smile. Chief withdrew the knife and stalked back into the dense forest, wet leaves trailing droplets of water on his armour. After a few minutes, I saw he'd tracked, and followed Fireteam Majestic. Gabriel Thorne was probably his next target; he was at the rear.

"Where is he? Or she? One of em's gotta be onto us by now," Thorne commented.

"Either that, or they're both onto us. This is why we don't play War Games with veteran Spartans, and especially not the Master Chief," Paul Demarco said sourly.

Chief simply exited the bush he was hiding in, jerked Gabriel's head back, and slashed open his throat. Lightning flashed for a split second, blinding the camera and illuminating the forest.

Then the Master Chief was gone.

He left Thorne's limp body crumpled on the wet, muddy ground. Rain poured over the armour. Anthony cried out as he noticed, "They got Gabriel!"

"Jesus! We didn't even see whoever that was! But now we know one of them is in the area, keep your eyes peeled. We can't let them kill any more of us!" Paul exclaimed. Little did the leader of Fireteam Majestic know that the Master Chief was nearly touching Carlo Hoya. The seven foot tall Spartan Two pulled the smaller Four into the bushes, dispatching him before he could make a sound.

"Only three more," Henryk observed.

Not for long, however. Anthony Madsen and Tedra Grant were also gone, and all in the next five minutes. Paul had no idea where Chief was, now. He wheeled about at the slightest noise, and yelled angrily into the dripping forest.

"Come out and fight! No more sneaky crap!" he exclaimed angrily. He turned away from the bush that the Master Chief was hiding in, and the Spartan Two didn't give the Fireteam leader another chance- he leapt out of the undergrowth, smashing an armoured fist into the back of Demarco's helmet. The Spartan Four stumbled, swivelling around as the Master Chief delivered a vicious uppercut to his chin, which caused the smaller Spartan's head to whip backwards and he flew through the air, landing in a crumpled heap. I automatically grabbed Henryk's arm in a death grip; I didn't like to see anything or anyone get hurt, even avatars. The pilot squeezed back sympathetically. I turned my attention back to the screen, Chief now stalking in circles around the semi-conscious Spartan Four. I was surprised, was this a show of gentleman ship, not kicking Paul while he was down? I didn't know, I didn't know if the man under all that armour could feel that. The Fireteam leader struggled to his feet, and spat venom.

"Just kill me and be done with it!"

The Master Chief, as usual, didn't seem obliged to say anything. Demarco threw himself towards the Spartan Two, but Chief dodged easily and smashed yet another fist into Paul's helmet. I was surprised at how strong the metal was; it wasn't even dented yet, but this time the helmet flew off, and I got a good look at Demarco's angry face. He had a shaved head, and very annoyed brown eyes. His pale face screwed up with rage as his helmet thudded softly onto the wet, leafy ground. Rain dripped down his face as the Spartan Four was drenched.

"Unfair play, now!" he spat.

Chief had other ideas. He swiftly lifted off his helmet with a pneumatic hiss as the air inside was released.

I didn't think I could recognise the avatar's face- I still couldn't think of Chief as John. I'd never seen his eyes this blank, or disinterested, and he didn't seem to notice the rain dripping down his scarred face and drenching his hair. He just stared at Demarco with an intensity, which even in the control room, caused my stomach to squirm uncomfortably. He'd never fix such a deadly, predatory gaze on me knowingly. It would scare me out of my wits. Paul launched a fist towards the Chief's face, but I didn't expect it to get very far, and I was right. With a blur, his arm blocked the Spartan Four's fist and retaliated likewise with a blow that knocked the Fireteam leader off his feet.

I bit my lip, waiting for his skull to crack, to ooze brain and blood, but nothing happened. In real life, Spartan bones were almost unbreakable, but Chief would almost certainly have given Paul horrible brain damage. I guess the War Game processed that, too, for Demarco didn't move.

The Master Chief had won.

A Few Minutes Later

Emily

"Excuse me, where are the Spartans who participated in the War Game?" I asked a passing blonde haired scientist. He halted stiffly with a

flourish of his white lab coat, pointing to Henryk and my right, down a busy corridor.

"Right down the end of there. Good day," and he bustled off.

"C'mon Henryk! I wanna see him before he takes his armour off!" I said, tugging the amused pilot behind me as I walked quickly down the corridor. I recognised Demarco and figured we were on the right track as the rest of Fireteam Majestic followed. Every single member had annoyed expressions on their stern faces, and they were still kitted out in armour. Thorne glanced behind him for a moment.

"If that's who you're looking for, there he is," he said, jerking his head to gesture.

I didn't acknowledge him.

I was too busy staring at the Master Chief. I had to crane my neck back to look up into the orange visor of his helmet. Henryk took a step back, but I didn't move. He was at least two or three feet taller than me and I gaped, awed.

"Oh my gosh oh my gosh I never imagined you'd be this big! I mean, I know how big you are but I didn't really know andâ€¦" I silenced myself as I realised the Spartan hadn't said anything, or moved. His orange visor just stared down at me. I saw my sheepish expression reflected in it, and I squeaked as even the visor had the intensity of the man's eyes that I knew was under all that armour. I reached out hesitantly to touch the armour, then realised what I was doing and snatched my hand back. My insides squirmed, and I looked shyly at the floor, shuffling my feet.

I felt something cold and rubbery touch my hand and I glanced up in surprise to find the Master Chief had grabbed it. I lifted it, examining the armour. The back of his hand had a small patch of armour, and had separate pieces for every joint in his fingers. On his palm there was nothing, just the textured black undersuit. I eyed the Spartan nervously. How would he react to my examination? A lock of my hair fell in front of my eyes and I dropped Chief's hand to flick it away. It wouldn't sit anywhere; just kept falling back into place. I played with it, not wanting to have that squirming feeling as the impenetrable visor stared at me. Suddenly, it was flicked behind my ear, and I looked up with shock as I realised who'd done it. Had the Master Chief really just done that?

I gaped in shock as the Spartan continued on his way, and I was left remembering the cold touch of metal on my cheek as he'd swept the irritating hair away from my face. I shivered involuntarily.

"Emilyâ€¦.He's not usually like that is he?" Henryk asked.

"Noâ€¦No, he's not."

Twenty Minutes Later

Henryk's Quarters

Emily

"I honestly don't know what made him do that. It made me feel really weird, and I don't exactly know what I mean by "weird"," I said as I sat on Henryk's desk chair. The strangely accented pilot's room was very much like John's, but slightly messier- the bed wasn't made and I few pieces of paper lay crumpled like dead leaves on the floor.

"I don't know, either. Maybe he just had a moment, that's all"

I shook my head.

"Noâ€¦I don't think soâ€¦" I sighed, "Can we please leave the subject?"

The handsome pilot sitting on the bed smiled.

"Of course."

I peered intently into those bluish green eyes.

"Let's talk about you. Where are you from? On a better thought, I don't know every single planet in this world, so I'll go with what nationality are you. As you can probably tell, I'm Australian."

Henryk winked and tutted a finger.

"I said I was a man of mystery."

"Hmmmâ€¦Lets play a game. You ask me a question, and I promise I'll answer it truthfully, and if I DO answer it, I get to ask YOU a question, and you have to answer it," I suggested, "Wanna play?"

The pilot smiled like a shark.

"Sounds fun. Let's play."

"I get to go first," I said, "How old are you?"

"Twenty four. What's your last name?"

"Taylor. Can you speak any different languages?"

He spewed out a stream of unrecognisable stuff in an even weirder accent and I decided that was a different language.

"Do you like flowers?" he asked.

"Yeah. What nationality are you? Not to be rude, but you sound really weird."

"My mother was Polish and my father was Finnish, hence my," he pointed to the spiky blonde hair on his head, "and my accent is strange because it's half so as well," he said, "My turn. Do you love John?"

I blinked in surprise.

"Umm. Weeeeellâ€¦.In a weird way, yes, he's like my protector, you know so I suppose I love him for it. That is, if that's what you mean," I said sheepishly.

Henryk nodded thoughtfully.

"My turn. What do you think of moi?" I said, pointing to myself.

He gave me a bedazzling smile.

"The cutest thing I've ever seen. So adorable!" he said flatteringly. I blushed a little and looked at the floor.

"What do you think of me?" he asked with a wink.

I rolled my eyes.

"Okay, you're very handsome, you have great hair and a good nature, and you're the living embodiment of Prince Charming," I said, the slightest bit sarcastically, "Well, a Polinish one," I laughed, combining Finnish and Polish. Henryk laughed too, and I giggled because he sounded like a demented hyena.

"I think the esteemed lady should visit the Spartan Two's quarters," he announced suddenly.

"Why?"

"Because what's between you is unfinished, and the worst kind of business is unfinished business. If you don't sort this out now, it'll be awkward and will only hurt you both," he explained gently, "But first, I've got something that might help," and he reached into the left pocket on his pants, and produced a hairclip, I squealed in delight as I saw it was made of glimmering and sparkling metal, in the shape of a pink daisy. Henryk smiled his shark-smile and motioned me closer, reaching into his right pocket and retrieving a sparkly silver hair band. I clapped my hands together; even a tomboy like me loved to get new hair, or fashion things. I turned and let him redo my ponytail with the new hairband. The pilot seemed to have an eye for prettiness, for he pulled a few strands free and let them dangle down my neck, and I put the flower clip into my hair.

"Wow! Where'd you get these? They'll just get wasted on John, anyway. He doesn't really notice these kinds of things."

"They were my mother's," he said, smiling, "and nonsense. The Spartan knows when he's looking at a pretty young lady."

I giggled.

"I'm still scared of him, though."

"He's your "protector". He wouldn't lay a finger on you, and you know it."

A Few Minutes Later

In Front of S-117's Door

Emily

My teeth chattered nervously, and I whispered angrily to Henryk.

"Go away! He can't be allowed see you!"

The pilot obeyed and hurried away with a wolfish grin on his face. I took a deep breath and knocked on the door, and waited. One second, two seconds, three seconds, four-

The door swung open, and I squeaked as John looked down at me. I chewed a nail nervously, and shifted under the intense blue gaze.

"Errmâ€|Hello?" I began.

John just appeared to be waiting for something.

"Can I erâ€|Come in or something?"

Still, he just stared at me reservedly, and I thought I saw a hint of sarcasm in his eyes.

"Please?"

He stepped away from the door, a gesture that told me to come in. I flopped down on his desk chair and looked at the wall as the Spartan closed the door. He turned to fix me with a slightly curious, and also miffed gaze. I played with my fingernail.

"Look, I'm sorry about-"

He held up a hand.

"But-"

A glare this time and I shut my mouth with an audible snap.

"You don't need to apologize," he said bluntly, "I should be."

I shook my head and squirmed uncomfortably on the chair.

"No, no no. I shouldn't haveâ€|.Oh I dunno! Neither of us should apologize!" I said in dismay, "Don't worry about it."

He nodded absent-mindedly, but then his eyes narrowed at a point above my head, and I realised he was looking at the flower clip that Henryk had given me.

"Who gave you that?"

"Oh, the clip and all that? That was Henryk. He's the best guy ever!"

John widened his eyes in mock shock, and I was surprised at how different he seemed out of his armour- not as serious, more emotional, and I must say, a lot more fun to be around, although he had annoying sarcastic tendencies and insults that he veiled very well.

"What about me?" he asked, in mock dismay. I laughed.

"Okay, okay, you're pretty awesome too," I admitted.

John seemed to search for something.

"You are veryâ€|.erâ€|?" he said, somewhat estranged. A weird expression contorted his face.

"_Pretty?_" I attempted to finish for him.

He shook his head ever so slightly.

"That was not what I was going to say," he said a tad awkwardly. Probably knew it hurt my feelings, but he didn't show recognition of that. Usual behaviour.

I flicked my ponytail and proceeded to spin on the comfy desk chair, making myself feel sick. After about twenty spins, I was stopped suddenly by a hand on the back of the chair. I opened my mouth to protest as John crossed in front of me, bending down to stare very closely at me. His breath didn't smell of anything, oddly. I opened my mouth and breathed air at him; I noticed with a flash of cruel pleasure that his eye twitched and they both narrowed. My breath obviously _stunk_. _He whispered in my face, on the verge of threatening.

"If you like to spin, I can get you into a G-simulator," he said, the breath from his words blowing my hair a little.

I paled as I thought of the spinning pods that astronauts, and jet pilots used in my world to train. I whispered back, nastily- making sure my foul breath reached him as much as possible.

"I think I'll stick to the chair _thanks_, " I spat.

The Spartan closed his eyes for a moment, probably recovering from my renowned stinky breath. He finally stood, withdrawing his face from my personal space, and I stuck out my tongue. He opened his eyes, blinked, and then gave me a look that was close to being _sly_. Jeez, the guy had the most unpredictable facial expressions I'd ever seen. One moment, he was serious, the next he was amused; next he could be sly, like he was now. He was probably plotting some punishment for my foul breath, and I wouldn't put it past him to do just that.

Then I felt the presence. Heavy, strong. Some animal instinct, long buried by millions of years, ignited; it gave me a desire to run, to hide- to find shelter. I looked around wildly, John catching my eye. I probably had huge eyes, with small irises and huge whites. I could tell that the Spartan knew exactly what I was scared of, and he pulled me off the chair. I tried to fight towards the door, to find the sanctuary that instinct demanded I find- but John's grip held me firm, and I knew there would be no escaping the Spartan. He roughly pushed me behind him as the lights in the room went out, the air cycling machines halting their continuous whirring. John's room grew silent, save from the breathing of the owner, and the frantic rhythm of my own. Goose flesh rose on my arms, and I fastened a death grip on John's arm as the room grew bitterly cold; I could feel the frost forming on my eyelashes. Throughout all this, the Spartan's pulse didn't change, my grip on his arm allowing me to feel it.

Then the Light decided to make its appearance, blinding me, but this time it _burnt_, hurting me. It was literally a miniature sun, and I felt the skin on my face blister and crack, bubbling. I screamed.

John acted, pushing me to the floor and hunching over me. His silhouette was framed against the Light, and I smelt flesh burning-whether it was my own, or his, I couldn't tell. His blue eyes gleamed in the light, then were squeezed shut. The only reason I wasn't a pile of molten gloop was the wall between me and the Light, made of enhanced muscle and virtually unbreakable bones; sheer mental strength. Then I felt the sucking feeling- we were about to get sucked into the Light. We were, again, at the Librarian's whim. I spun into the horrible Light, losing my grip on John's arm.

The last thing I heard before I passed out was John's voice, raised in a yelp of pain and shock.

John

I tumbled endlessly through the vortex, wincing as the skin on my back bubbled and cooled. I fought to stay awake. Where ever I came out, I would probably need to defend myself. I felt something within the Light weaken. Suddenly the light that seemed to form some sort of tunnel broke, spewing me out about five hundred feet into the air, above a dense and snowy pine forest. A frail winter sun glowed; it was probably midday. I flailed my arms- Spartans could only fall a maximum of thirty meters without cracking a bone, and as I fell I prepared for the inability to walk, or to move a part of my body. Twenty meters, ten, five-

Splosh.

_I crashed into a patch of ice I hadn't seen, the thin crust breaking as I splashed into a freezing pond. I was thankful the ice hadn't been any thicker, because that could have had the momentum-breaking force of smacking into concrete. Already, my fingers were numb and my boots sodden. I swam to the surface, gasping in a breath. The icy water chilled my back, but it _hurt_. At least it stopped my burnt flesh from bubbling. I dragged myself up onto the ice, praying my enhanced muscles and bones wouldn't crack the ice- the augmentations had caused my muscles to be denser and denser meant heavier. The coating on my bones didn't help, either, and add on the fact that I probably weighed another three kilos from all the water my boots and clothes had soaked up, and the ice breaking was probably inevitable.

_

_I knew weighing close to one hundred and forty kilograms _without _being soaked would come to a disadvantage someday, and I crawled slowly across the ice. I shouldn't stand up. That would focus too much of my weight on one spot. So far, so good. No cracks. I'd landed smack in the centre of the small lake, dangerous because that was the weakest spot for the ice. I needed to get to the edges._

_I didn't hear the ice crack, and a wash of embarrassment flowed over me as I fell into the icy water. I winced as my back came into contact with a piece of freed ice, the frozen water scraping along the scabs and sores that had already begun to form. I heaved myself out again, fingers numbed by the cold. _

_Snow begun to fall, the small flakes embedding themselves in my drenched clothes and hair. I reached the boundaries of the lake, standing unsteadily in the snow. I staggered against a pine tree, the strength draining out of my legs as I collapsed into the powdery white ground. My face sunk in a foot, and I flailed to breathe. I

couldn't find the strength to pull myself out, and I fell limp, suffocating in the snow._

What a fabulous way to die, I thought wryly.

Then I heard the footsteps, long before I felt the warm breath on my neck.

A growl, then teeth fastened into my collar, tugging at the burnt remains of my shirt. I was rolled over, and I took a deep breath.

A wolf crouched over me, the same colour as the snow around me- pure white. No blood stained its muzzle, and its eyes were the colour of the setting sun.

"_Welcome back, John," it said._

Oliver's House

Oliver

Vega pulled. I pulled back. The brown Staffy cross growled. The stick was pulled. The stick was tugged.

I let go of the stick.

Vega trotted away triumphantly. I huffed and sat on the grass, pouting. Daisy, my little six year old sister, jumped happily on the trampoline, the springs fixed to the black mat squeaking. The chickens, down the other end of the yard, clucked happily as they scratched in their enclosure. I turned to make my way back to the house, but that Light flashed into existence in front of me. It was small, and dull. It gently deposited a familiar form onto the mown grass, and then winked out.

"_Emily?"_

I rushed forward, Daisy following suit. Emily lay on her stomach, her back turned to the sky. I paled as I saw the burnt flesh, blisters and bubbles. Daisy halted suddenly. I knelt by Emily, shaking her as I called for mum.

"_Muuuum! Emily just appeared! She's hurt!"_

The thirteen year old didn't respond, and I thought she was probably knocked out. Mum came rushing down the stairs, and looked down at Emily's back.

"_We should move her," she said nervously._

"_That could hurt her, though, Mummy," said Daisy._

"_It's better than leaving her out here!" I exclaimed._

Mum nodded, lifting a side.

"_You get the other side, Oliver, Daisy, you make sure you grab her legs."_

Together we lifted the limp teenager. As we staggered up the steps to the veranda, Emily groaned and opened her eyes.

"_O..Oliver?" she whispered._

"_Don't worry; you're safe, at my house. You aren't anywhere dangerous or anything," I replied to the dazed girl._

"_My backâ€¦_" she whimpered, and then I noticed the red dripping on the veranda's brown planks._

"_Muumâ€¦_" Daisy said, noticing them too._

We got her into the house, setting her gently on the couch. It made no difference however gently we did it, for she screamed as soon as her mutilated back touched the fake leather. We turned her over, the remains of her shirt almost falling off her body. The teenager fell unconscious again, and I felt tears forming. Emily's face was blistered, and burnt, but it looked like nothing more than a serious sunburn, unlike the part of her body that was exposed. Mum wrung her hands.

"_I don't know what to do!"_

"_Shouldn't we clean her sores, or something, Mummy?" I suggested hopefully._

She nodded agreement, rushing to the bathroom to get washers and wet them. Daisy gave me a hug.

"_Where's John?" she asked._

"_I don't know, he didn't appearâ€¦_" I replied._

"_I bet he'd know what to do," my sister said._

I agreed silently as my mother rushed back into the room, hands full of dripping towels, washers and handtowels. She cleaned the encrusted blood off Emily's back first, her face pale and clammy as she worked. Next, she set the towels on the teenager's back, to cool the irritated and burnt flesh. Last, she put a cold handtowel on the girl's face, to soothe her and calm her down when she woke.

"_That's all I can do, I think."_

"_Can't we take her to the hospital?" Daisy asked._

"_No," I replied instantly, "I think she's hurt too badly to explain to the doctors- I mean, only a fire could do this, and usually fires are on the news and stuffâ€¦_.So we'd have nothing to tell them, because there was no fire. It would be suspicious," I replied, startled at my own conviction. Mum gaped at me._

"_Oliver, are you okay?"_

"_I'm fine, Mum."_

Daisy sniffed, glancing at the unconscious form on the couch.

"_Will she be okay?"_

Mum looked at the floor.

"_I don't know," she admitted. _

Emily awoke with a start.

"_John? John! JOHN?!" she yelled at the top of her lungs._

"_He's not here!" I yelled over her._

"_Wâ€|.What?" she said weakly, exhausted by her efforts._

"_He didn't appear with you. We don't know where he is," Mum replied._

"_I had a dreamâ€|.That..Thatâ€|He was in a snowy place and that he was surrounded by wolves, growling. They looked like they were going to attack him and John's back wasâ€|." she groaned, cutting off her story. She blinked, and then continued, "His back was worse than mine. My face and body is the worst. He saved me, you know. From the Light. I would have died if he hadn't stopped it burning me," she said sadly._

I looked at the floor.

"_Do you know why he would do that?" Daisy asked._

"_I suppose it's an instinct for him, to protect people. I don't know why he wants to protect _me_ so much, I mean, I'm just a kid. I'm not special," she said, between pauses for short, rapid breaths. She shifted uncomfortably on the couch. _

"_We can put you on my bed, if you like," my mother suggested quietly._

"_Yesâ€|Thank you. Please?" Emily replied. _

We lifted her as we did before, staggering down the hallway to my parents room, taking a right into it. We set the teenager on her back again, but this time she didn't cry out. The towels and the cleaning it had done their job. She collapsed, limp.

"_So sleepy," she whispered._

She fell asleep, just as she finished her sentence.

Emily

I dreamed. I didn't want to. I wanted peace, but who was I to challenge my own consciousness?

I was in a field of crisp grass. Henryk lay on his back beside me, making daisy chains. My back wasn't burning as if it was on fire, and my face didn't burn, either. I felt confused, but I giggled strangely at the pilot as he wound the daisy stems into a chain. Huge black berries grew around the edges of the field, the grass whispering in the breeze. Henryk looked at me solemnly, his green eyes

serious.

"Hello, Emily," he said.

I smiled.

"Hi."

I felt really happy. I knew I shouldn't be, that I should be in pain, the corners of my vision blackening, my legs like jelly.

"This isn't a normal dream, Emily," he said seriously.

"Why isn't it? You seem perfectly normal to me," I said, smiling again.

"You don't understand. I created this. I contacted you. You are in something I made, my dream, my reality, what _I chose_ to make," he said.

I frowned. My happiness was fading away, and I grew aware of everything.

"My backâ€|Johnâ€|.The Lightâ€|"

Henryk looked at me for a moment. The light that the sun gave off had an almost hazy effect, the Finnish pilot's features blurred, his white skin marred.

"The Light _did_ take you then," he stated.

"It didâ€|.But it hurt us. My back-"

Henryk interrupted.

"I know. Don't worry."

I squinted.

"Are you connected, too?"

Henryk looked away.

"Only to the people I want to be connected to. You see, I can choose."

The sun grew dark, and Henryk flinched.

"Someone is breaking into my dream," he said.

Clouds rolled in overhead, thunder boomed in the distance. I shivered, shuffling closer to Henryk. He stood, pulling me up with him. Lightning flashed, thunder crashed and I thought the ground might break under my feet. Henryk shook, in fear or exertion, I couldn't tell. But the sunshine seemed to fight the clouds, pushing them back, burning away the water. He turned to me.

"Go! It's not safe anymore!"

Everything grew even hazier.

"When will you talk to me again?" I asked.

"Soon! I promise! Go now!"

Everything faded away, and I woke with a start to my burning face.

Earlier

UNSC Infinity

Amanda

_Where were those two little slackers? I tapped my foot impatiently. Kelly, Fred, Linda and the strange pilot Henryk all seemed miffed.

_

"_If they were going to come, they should have been here a while ago," the strangely accented pilot commented. Kelly scoffed a reply._

"_Honestly, I'm not surprised."_

"_Why ever not?" asked Fred. _

"_Because you put those two together and they think they can do anything they like," she spat._

Henryk shook his head angrily, his spiky blonde hair trembling. Greenish-blue eyes flashed angrily.

"_Emily would never do that! She may complain, but she'd still do it!" _

"_Hey! Hey! Break it up. We've got other possibilities to consider, ya know! Don't be blind bats in the daylight! You know, even that damn Light thingy coulda taken 'em."_

"_That's very likely," Linda commented. _

_The team turned as Sarah Palmer appeared on the pedestal with just her black undersuit on. She strode over importantly. _

"_Where the _heck_ is John?" she asked._

"_Gone. We think the Light may have taken him and Emily," Fred replied. _

"_Well, if they come back, we're screwed to high hell," she said.

_

"_Why's that?" Henryk asked. _

The Spartan Commander sighed.

"_Spill the beans, Comm, we've got a Pelican ta fix!" I said impatiently. _

"_Okay, so the Infinity's engines are made from back engineered

Forerunner tech. Lately; we were informed by John that the Light is essentially the Librarian's transport tool."_

_We all nodded. _

"_Anyway, every time the Light transports someone here, the Forerunner engines are disturbed, as the Light has such a strong Forerunner influence. Essentially, its breaking the engines apart and there's only so much engineers can do for them. The wild energy that the Light exudes causes rogue power inputs from the main engines and thrusters, effectively deviating the Infinity from its course. If John or Emily comes back, the wild deviation will most likely put us into the nearest sun, by Roland's calculations._

She rubbed her temples.

"_Gosh, now I sound like an egghead," she groaned._

"_So, lemme get this straight," I said, "We're going to die because of our friends?"_

Henryk shifted impatiently.

"_I have to go," he said._

"_What?" I turned to him._

"_It's important. I need to go!" he flung over his shoulder as he ran across the pedestal and down it's steps. _

"_Gosh! Where'd he need to go so quickly?" Sarah commented. I rolled my eyes._

"_Strange guy, strange habits."_

Henryk's Quarters

Henryk

I needed to contact Emily. I needed to warn her! If she comes back, we're all dead! Luckily, I'd chosen to connect with her through the flower clip. It was my mother's; and she'd had the same ability as me. The clip had been created as a connector, and an anchor for her powers, and she'd eventually used it to communicate with the owner over long distances. I didn't know how the link would work through space and time, but I would try. I carefully allowed the magic to flow into me, telling me of what Emily had been doing, what she was feeling, if she was asleep or not.

_I was met by a barrage of pain, mismatched thoughts, John, the Light, the smell of burning flesh. Emily was asleep, unaware of my intrusion. I gasped as I felt the wounds on her back, her burnt face, her tortured heart. You couldn't really call this link magic- the link between John and Emily couldn't be put into any category. I always thought as magic as a different kind of science, but there was never another name for it than "magic". _

_I made a dream. I made a field, grass, berries, and daisies. Sunny, happy. I lay down on the bed, pulling Emily's consciousness into it as mine faded back into my body. Now I was in the dream, having full

awareness as my body lay limp on the bed. Emily appeared next to me. I turned to look at her, the grass swaying in the breeze._

"_Hello, Emily."_

"_Hi," she replied, giggling at the daisy chain I was making._

"_This isn't a normal dream, Emily," I said seriously._

"_Why isn't it? You seem perfectly normal to me," she replied._

"_You don't understand. I created this. I contacted you. You are in something I made, my dream, my reality, what I _chose_ to make," I said impatiently. _

She frowned, and I saw the realisation dawn in her blue eyes.

"_My backâ€|Johnâ€|.The Lightâ€|" she whispered._

"_The Light did take you then," I stated._

"_It didâ€|.But it hurt us. My burns-"_

I interrupted.

"_I know. Don't worry."_

Emily squinted, thinking.

"_Are you connected, too?"_

I looked away. That was close enough to the truth to make me uncomfortable.

"_Only to the people I want to be connected to. You see, I can choose," I replied._

The sun grew dark, and I grew nervous. Sometimes my dreams weren't entirely secure; dangerous sub conscious beings could invade, except when they killed you, they really killed you. You died, and to anyone who was in the physical world, it seemed like you'd died in your sleep.

"_Someone is breaking into my dream," I said, looking upwards._

Clouds rolled in overhead, thunder boomed in the distance. Emily trembled, shuffling closer to me. I stood, pulling the teenager up with me, the wind howled, tossing Emily's hair about. Lightning flashed, thunder crashed. I willed the sun to return, focusing my thoughts and energy. The light beat back the dark, slowly. I turned quickly to Emily.

"_Go! It's not safe anymore!"_

Everything grew even hazy as the battle between light and dark continued.

"_When will you talk to me again?" she asked, confused._

"_Soon! I promise! Go now!"_

She faded away, back into her body. She'd be waking up, now. I destroyed my dream world, waking up in my bed with a cold sheen of sweat on my forehead.

John

The wolves howled into the night, their breath forming clouds in the freezing air. Pups tumbled about me as I sat on a log, squeaking and barking. They were the Alpha's pups. The snowy wolf had run back to camp, alerting the other members. Together, they'd pulled me into their snow cave. My long sleeve shirt had since degraded, becoming mere strips of rags held together by the finest of threads. My pants weren't that worse for wear, luckily. If either of my clothes fell off, or finally broke, I'd freeze to death. I was already cold. I shook the snow forming in my hair loose, as the cubs tripped over one of my booted feet. An Omega slinked about, searching for any sort of scrap left by any of the higher ranked wolves. Since I'd left the wolves to their new home, a new Beta had risen in this pack, the snowy she-wolf who'd found me. In order to strengthen their packs, all the wolves had shared individuals with each other, the snowy wolf being one of them.

I began to wonder if the wolves had names. I looked up as the Alpha padded over to me.

"_I hope my pups haven't been a trouble to you?" he asked, amused as a pup scrambled on top of my cold log, barking at me in a high pitched voice. I turned and gave it an icy glare, as cold as the lake I'd fallen in. The pup squealed, slid off the log, and ran off. The Alpha laughed, barking happily._

"_We'll need to find you some clothes," the Alpha pondered, "But as far as the wolf packs know, there is no civilization in which to steal you any, or get any made."_

I thought for a moment.

"_What about animals?"_

"_What about them?" the Alpha asked._

"_Deer, elk, moose. Do you hunt them?" I asked._

"_Yes? Why?"_

"_I could make clothes using their skins," I said._

The wolf frowned- well, I thought he did. An equivalent of a wolf frown was a slight curling of the muzzle and a strange cocking of the tail.

"_That would be too hard- the skin needs to be cured, softened. You'll need buckets for that, and you know we don't have those. Plus, you'll need to get the skin _off_ first."_

I drew my knife, hidden in my pocket, as a reply.

The Alpha female trotted up, a lovely cross between silver and white.

"_I heard your conversation. It would be a good idea, except for those setbacks."_

"_I could beat the skin to make it softer," I suggested._

The Alpha nodded thoughtfully.

"_That could work. With your enhancements, you could do it hard, all day. You'd soften it in no time, plus we can help, chewing the hide also works. First, we'll need to find deer. We brought one down only a little while ago, but there's nothing left, and the pack is not hungry again, yet. But my mate will need lots of food to give enough milk to sustain the pups, so we'll have to hunt soon."_

I winced as a flare of pain emanated from my back. I couldn't help exposing the delicate skin to the biting air; I had nothing to cover the large patch that the Light had burnt away. The Alpha blinked sympathetically.

"_One of the packs has a healer- she knows the only herbs that can grow in this area, and what they can do for you. We could take you to her- the packs know of you, and Emily. There would be no hostility," he informed me._

"_How far?"_

"_Quite far. It usually takes us around three days to make the journey, if you were a normal human, it would take you around a week, but you can run faster than us, and run for longer, so we'll be the ones taking the breaks, not you," the Alpha female finished for her mate._

I decided to ask for names. I needed to call the wolves something else besides "Alpha" "Omega" "Beta" and "pups".

"_Do wolves have names?" I asked tentatively._

The Alpha positively glowed.

"_Yes, of course. We do not usually give them to strangers; we tend to wait until we know the strangers will not use our names against us. Even then, we wait for the friend to ask for names, as you have just done," he gestured to his mate with his silvery, flag of a tail, "My mate is Shazkran," he said, purring the words with a deep accent, "I am Ezikal, and our three pups are Rezier, Emiry, and Kazaran," he said, pronouncing each word slowly so I knew how to say each strange name._

Shazkran continued, "The white wolf who rescued you is Stranakia, a female, and our three Omegas are Nisus, Cloua and Kipachu," she said, flicking her tail to each of the wolves as they cleaned and maintained the camp, and exercised their legs for the hunts. I committed every name to memory, and I knew I would never forget them. I retained any information, a part of my training. A pup ran toward me, white with spots of grey, and I questioned Ezikal with a glance.

"_That is Rezier, a male," he said, "Children! Come here!" he called, and two other pups flung themselves towards him, licking his muzzle and tumbling between his legs. He pointed one out with his tail, a silvery grey pup with a mask of black on its right eye, "This is Kazaran, a female," he pointed to another pup, a brownish grey, "This is Emiry, another female. You may have already guessed, but we named her after Emily," he said with a happy growl. _

Of course, I had already suspected as much. Not a lot ever slipped under my radar. A cold breeze stirred the rags of my shirt, and I gave Shazkran a meaningful glance. The three pups barked at their father, who growled playfully at them.

"_Stranakia will take you to the healer. The less wolves in the party, the less it seems like a threat. You will pass through one other pack leaders territory, Risishan's, and he is still prickly after the incident with the didact. Stranakia!" he called. The white she-wolf padded over._

"_Yes, Alpha?"_

"_You need not call me that. John knows our names. You know of the wounds on his back, and you know the healer. You must take him- the wounds could become infected. We cannot all come, for I must run the pack and take care of my mate. Will you take the Spartan to the healer?"_

Stranakia nodded.

"_It would be a pleasure, Ezikal."_

"_First, John and you must sleep. It will be a tiring journey."_

In The Morning

John

Stranakia insisted on a steady pace.

"_You may be able to get there quicker, but you need my guidance."_

I breathed out a large cloud into the dawn air. The sky glowed pink as the sun slowly crawled its way up the sky. The air didn't warm, and I didn't expect it to. The cold numbed my burnt back, and that was good for such a long trek. Rigorous movement yesterday had opened some scabs and popped a few blisters.

"_When will we cross the other territory?" I asked._

"_Soon, maybe about two deer's leaps."_

I guessed that was two hours, and Stranakia knew I'd guessed right, for she didn't explain.

"_What is the healer's name?" I asked another question. I couldn't help myself; I was curious, a rare occurrence. _

"_Since you are a friend of the wolf packs, I'll tell you. Her name

is Rosamina, and I'd expect you to use it when you approach her. Being a wolf pack friend and not using the name for a formal wolf like her is great disrespect. It signals ignorance, and rudeness," she said, turning her head to look at me with her orangey eyes._

I continued our fast jog.

"_You seem to have a very organised order and a lot of customs," I commented._

"_In time, you'll learn them, but for now you'll only be taught the basics of wolf society. Enough so that you don't get your arms ripped off for disrespect," she joked. _

I gave her a sincere look.

"_I'd like to see them try," I said flatly._

Stranakia snorted with amusement.

"_I don't think even you could stand against the twenty or so wolves in the pack we're travelling to," she said with a curl of her muzzle, "The other two packs are much bigger than mine. Ezikal knows it."_

I didn't reply.

Stranakia eventually slowed to a loping walk.

"_I must rest. Don't even think about going on without me, or Risishan will have your hide!"_

I rolled my eyes.

"_Don't think there's enough undamaged skin on me to make a hide out of," I said dryly, my back sparking _again_ with annoying pain._

"_Your flimsy clothes could supplement, I suppose," she replied with an amused twitch of her snowy white ear._

"_I'm afraid even they'll be falling off, soon."_

"_I'm very surprised you haven't dropped dead from hypothermia, yet. Any normal human would have had his toes dropped off by now, yet you're managing it with half the clothes," she said._

"_I'm not a normal human, Stranakia."_

"_That much, I can tell," she panted into the air, the sky rapidly lightening as the sun continued its slow winter trek. The white she wolf stood as she rested._

"_How long until we cross the territory?" I asked._

"_Honestly, you're no better than those pups! Questions, questions, always questions. We'll cross the territory in half a deer leap, and if you ask again, I'll be forced to chastise you like a pup. After that, it's about another two days at our quickest pace."_

"_You mean, your quickest pace," I stated._

Stranakia growled at me lowly.

"_Be quiet, you."_

"_How long will you be resting for?" I asked._

"_I swear to Lupusâ€|" she growled playfully._

She leapt at my legs, barrelling into me with the force of a Covenant alien. I tumbled to the side, as Stranakia dripped slobber all over my face.

"_I hope your spit washes out!" I grimaced as the wolf grabbed onto my leg gently and tugged._

"_If hunting these deer works out, it won't matter! You'll be wearing our prey!" she growled through a mouthful of nylon pants. I tugged back, sitting up and cuffing her around the ear._

"_I sure hope none of your pack think I'm a deer and try to hunt me!" I snapped._

"_Oh no. You're too _fat_ to be a deer," she yapped slyly._

That's it!

I sat up, and launched myself back at the wolf, tumbling her over. Her stinky breath was panted over me, reminding me of Emily. Stranakia squirmed violently, and then she was free, dancing around me and yelping with victory and the spoils of her win. I rested, face first in the power snow. Thankfully, my face didn't sink in and the snow didn't suffocate me. I was lucky my back hadn't given me any pain; it was too numb from the freezing air to send any messages to my brain.

"_Now we'll have to rest twice as long," I mumbled into the snow._

"_Only because you aggravated me," Stranakia said._

I didn't reply, sitting up in the snow and giving her a reserved glance. Stranakia cocked her head to the side for a moment.

"_What happened to your back, anyway?"_

"_The Light, when it came, it was bright, and hot. Too hot. I had to protect Emily; otherwise the heat would have killed her. I pushed her to the ground, and crouched over her. It was the only way."_

"_Where is she now?"_

"_I don't know. She didn't come out with me."_

Stranakia shook herself.

"_Let's go. We need to get you to the healer. I don't think you can amputate an infected _back_, plus none of us have any hands."_

"_That might be somewhat of a draw back to being a wolf."_

The white she wolf scoffed.

"_Please! Wolves can run far faster than any normal human, and their jaws can bite with over one hundred times the force. I think that makes up for not having hands."_

I didn't reply, instead continuing the fast, yet steady jog.

Oliver's House

Emily

I slumped uselessly on the couch, spooning in mouthfuls of Rose's delicious chicken stew. My body still burnt like fire where the heat from the Light had come into contact with my pale and delicate skin. It weakened me, and blood still occasionally wept from the sores and blisters. I'd woken up at around six pm, after Henryk had contacted me, crying with the pain and my belly screaming out in hunger. And here I was, stuffing the most delicious stew ever into my mouth. I finished, with a burp. Even that small sudden movement ignited pain that flashed all over my burnt skin; I bit my lip, a small tear sliding pitifully down my face. The remains of my shirt barely covered me, and I was slightly afraid of modesty. I wished desperately for John, for Henryk, for Fred, anyone. Oliver and Daisy were okay- but they were both too young to properly understand. Rose, and her husband Samuel; well, they were older, but too inexperienced to understand, either. John could give me the strength I needed, Henryk could make me feel better, and Fred could give me silent company, not offering any sympathies- so I felt strong. I collapsed in a fit of tears on the couch, wishing, hoping, and waiting.

But no one was coming. Rose was too busy googling burn treatments, when what I really needed was a doctor, but even Oliver knew better than I did, taking me to the doctor was out of the option. I reckoned John's burns would have already half healed by now; he didn't have any augmentations for faster healing like the Spartan Fours, but the guy was strong, and fit. Unlike me, I was just a normal girl, weak, and insignificant. The sun rose, framing the furniture in a golden light, and warming my burnt face.

Emily?

I started at the sound of John's voice in my head.

How stupid was I! Stupid stupid stupid! I hadn't thought to contact John through the link! He'd obviously forgotten, also! We were both so new to it; we'd gotten out of practise using it when I'd arrived at the Infinity.

John! Oh my gosh oh my gosh oh my gosh WHERE THE HECK ARE YOU?I replied frantically.

In the wolves world. Where are you?

Oliver's house, my world. Are you okay? How are the wolves? Are they alright?

My back is burnt. A she wolf is taking me to another pack's healer. The wolves are fine. You are in pain, I can tell.

I felt a little dizzy with the pain that the Spartan had detected, and relief.

My faceâ€¦.My face is burnt, bad, and so is my body. My back is, a little, but it's okay. I didn't think to use the link, either! How stupid am I! I said, shamefully.

We were both too absorbed in our problems to think about that. Don't beat yourself up about it, he replied instantly, and I noticed the small note of pain in his mental voice. He was in pain, and I suspected his injuries were worse than he would let on.

You're hurt more than you're telling me, aren't you?

I was okay, until I tripped on a snow covered rock. It toreâ€¦It tore open all the sores, and the scabs. It ripped off my new skin, too.

I cringed as I imaged it.

I hope that healer will do a good job, I said.

She'd better or I could die, he replied.

I suddenly felt a compelling desire to sleep. I fought valiantly, hearing John's questions, growing slightly worried as I didn't reply. I relaxed, letting the tide of weariness wash over me. I didn't know what had made me so tired, usually the pain stopped me from falling asleep unless I was completely exhausted.

Near Rhanaluka Territory Boundary

John

I felt Emily's thoughts disappear, and I noticed the subtle quietening of her mind as she fell asleep. I was quite concerned- If the child didn't have the strength and stamina to keep herself awake and talk to me, what hope did she have of staying alive? I tried to forget about it. I couldn't do anything, and chewing my lip off with worry wouldn't help. Stranakia trotted nonstop, I knew she was tired but she knew the longer it took to get to the healer, the better the chance of my freshly torn back getting worse. She pushed herself for my sake, and I was thankful for it.

"_We are arriving at Risishan's pack territory now. This boundary has often been argued over, but it finally settled a few months ago," she explained, "So keep an eye out for hunters, or border guards. Ezikal didn't have time to howl to Risishan to warn him of our crossing, since it's such a complicated message and he didn't want to disturb our rest. Things could get hostile, although the packs are bound to a treaty at the current time. No pack shall fight another pack."_

"_I think I can hear wolves," I said._

I heard the faint crunching of their paws on the snow, their excited breathing and their pounding hearts. Many underestimated my hearing, and many had paid for their ignorance.

"_I can smell them," Stranakia said, "Come out! We are only crossing your territory briefly!" she growled. The wolves emerged, finally- there were four of them. Three were the usual silvery grey, but the last was a deep russet. Their tails were positioned vertically, and I suspected it was a show of dominance. Stranakia crouched, and she snapped at me quietly._

"_Bow, too. If you are in another pack's territory, you must bow to the owners if you don't have formal permission," she snarled._

_I ignored the protest from my injuries and sank to my knees, pressing my forehead into the icy ground. I didn't like this. I didn't like submitting to _anyone_. I was trained to never give up, and right now, that training wanted to take control and force me to rise, to fight. I shoved it down. The midday sun shone on my now bleeding back, lighting up the snow to a blinding glare._

"_Rise, Rhanaluka wolf, Stranakia. Human, you may rise," one of the wolves said grandly. I didn't know which one, for my head was pressed into the snowy earth. I stood, shakily. _

"_My guess is that you're headed to the healer, John," said the russet wolf as I realised he was the one who'd spoken. He looked at me with grey eyes._

"_Yes," I replied. Stranakia whispered a name so quietly that only I could hear, _

"_Ranaseka."_

"_Yes, Ranaseka," I continued quickly._

"_Then with the grace of Risishan himself, I bless you for a good journey and may your wounds heal. You may continue."_

"_Thank you, honourable guard patrol," Stranakia finished, padding away quickly. I followed her, ignoring the blood dripping down me.

_

"_You're getting worse," she stated._

"_Bowling didn't help."_

"_That was what was required. You would have caused much shame to my pack if you hadn't."_

"_Ranaseka, Who is he?" I asked._

"_He's the lead border guard wolf of the Planaka pack- very important, that was why I gave you his name."_

"_He didn't ask why I was injured," I stated._

"_That's not his place. We were passing through his territory without express permission, so news and gossip are not proper, and so are questions," she explained, picking up the pace to a fast run this time._

"_Don't you feel the pain your back should be giving you?" the white

she wolf asked._

"_Sometimes. I can ignore it."_

"_You're amazing."_

"_I'll take that as a compliment."_

"_You should, because it was," she replied flatly._

I matched her pace, but didn't reply.

"_We'll only push on until it gets dark. We should arrive in Uranila territory by midday the next day at that pace," she planned._

Around Six PM That Night.

John

"_So what territory are we in right now?" I asked._

"_Shared territory; boundaries between Rhanaluka, Planaka and Uranila merge here, so any wolf is free to pass. Or human, for that matter," Stranakia said, shifting in the makeshift snow cave the wolf and myself had dug out. It was a lot warmer in here, as I'd blocked the entrance with packed snow bricks. _

"_Tell me more about the packs and their leaders," I asked. _

"_The Alpha of Rhanaluka is Ezikal, obviously. I'm the leader of the border guard, and the three Omegas are my side-guards. Shazkran is Ezikal's mate, she's second in command. The three pups are potential heirs to Ezikal's dominance, if he dies; the oldest pup becomes the Alpha, guided by Shazkran if she still breathes. We have nine in our pack. The leader of Planaka is Risishan, and the border guard leader is Ranaseka, as you already know. Those other three wolves were out of the six he has as his side-guards. Risishan doesn't have any pups; his whole pack is fifteen strong," she said, "You needn't know all their names. Now, Uranila. The leader of Uranila is a she-wolf named Frazwera, a rare occurrence. She-wolves aren't usually leaders of packs. She has by far_ _th__e strongest pack, at twenty one. Her border guard leader is Janasirak, and he has seven out of the twenty one as his side-guards," she said._

"_I didn't know you were a border guard leader," I commented._

"_It wasn't important," she said dismissively, her orangey eyes glinting in the darkness. I could still see her perfectly, thanks to the enhancement of my eyes. _

"_We need to rest. We'll have to travel nonstop tomorrow if we're going to make it to Frazwera's territory," she announced, flopping on her side. There wasn't enough room for me to be comfortable so I just crunched up into a ball and closed my eyes. _

Oliver's House

Emily

I blinked awake.

I jumped in surprise as I noticed Henryk stood in front of me. I was in the same green field as before, the haziness still present. I felt anger as I realised he must have sent me to sleep somehow, and I let the fire break free.

"Henryk, please explain to me why you can do this dream stuff? Are you a freak or something?! I was having quite a nice chat with John, _thank you_ very much!" I snapped.

Henryk's greenish blue eyes flashed angrily in response as I awakened his own fire.

"Freak?! Easy for you to say! You talk to people with your mind! And how should I know you were talking to the biggest freak of them all, you know who I'm talking about! I don't know everything that's going on inside that _puny_ mind of yours!"

I marched closer to the pilot, glaring up at him.

"How _dare_ you! John is not a freak! Don't blame him for what Halsey did to him, he was _six years old!_ Puny mind? _PUNY?_" I spluttered. I grabbed the front of his grey shirt and shook him. The pilot viciously grabbed my hands and held them. I tried to yank them free but they were held tight.

"I didn't use all my strength to bring you here to argue with me!" he snapped.

I looked shamefully at my feet.

"You're right. I'm sorry. I've just been through a lot. I mean, every moment of the day I hurt in more ways than I can explain, and I'm lonely. It feels horrible. No-one can do anything for me."

"But you have your friends," he said.

"They don't understand!" I exclaimed.

"I understand," he said with sad eyes. I hugged the pilot, and strangely his warmth radiated out somehow.

"Henryk, why'd you even contact me? And how exactly are you doing this?"

"Emily, the Infinity is falling apart. Well, her engines are for the most part," he said.

"What? Why?"

"Look, you know more about the Infinity than I do. You're a Halo expert. What technology do the Infinity's engines use?"

"Wellâ€¦.Forerunner."

"Exactly. Everyone knows now that the Light is the Librarian's doing, and think, just think. What kind of power would it take to transport a _living being_ through space and time?" Henryk prodded.

"A lot of power. Forerunner power, since the Light is a weird Forerunner thing," I suggested. The blonde haired pilot nodded, sitting on the grass and pulling me down with him.

"Whoa," I said as I nearly tumbled down the grassy slope.

"Every time that light transports someone here, it disturbs systems of the Infinity. I'm talking about flight deviations, navigation failures, that sort of thing. If John- or you- comes back, the next disturbance will send the Infinity on a course with the nearest sun, as she's stationary with the repairs we're doing. It'll kill us all."

I blanched.

"What?"

"In short- either you or John will kill us," he shortened. I twisted the grass under my hands.

"No! No that can't be!" I stammered. Henryk slung his arm around me.

"You can't control when the Light decides to take you, or where it decides to take you. It won't be your entire fault."

I threw his arm off and stood, stomping away across the field. I turned and yelled at him.

"ENTIRE FAULT? I'LL KILL SEVENTEEN THOUSAND PEOPLE! DON'T TALK TO ME LIKE ITS OKAY!" Tears burst in streams and I turned and fled into the forest.

I would kill them. Eventually the Light would take me back, and I would kill them. Seventeen thousand people. Fred, Amanda, Kelly, Linda, Sarah, and Lasky. Henryk too. I'd end their lives. I stumbled over tree roots, as the sky overhead began to darken; the fake sun began to set. Henryk obviously hadn't closed his dumb dream world yet- he was probably still looking for me. Well, he wouldn't find me. My tears dried, and sorrow was replaced by anger. I ran faster, faster, faster, until I was sure even John wouldn't be able to catch me, and I burst out of the forest, nearly running straight over a small waterfall. I skidded to a halt as the spray from the waterfall soaked my clothes. I peered over the edge, through the spray of water. The waterfall's pond was dominated with huge, sharp rocks, and was about ten meters high.

Did it really matter if I killed myself? It was only a dream! Maybe I might even be freed from Henryk's freak world if I died.

I sprinted over the waterfall, closing my eyes and waiting for my body to hit the rocks at the bottom.

I hit them; I felt the impact, for sure.

But I didn't feel any pain as I opened my eyes. My legs and arms lay sprawled all over the rocks, but I wasn't injured at all.

I couldn't die. I couldn't get hurt, couldn't feel pain, and couldn't

escape from my prison.

I screamed out with anger and misery, pulling myself off the rocks and collapsing into the water. I tried to let myself drown, but it seemed that air didn't matter. My lungs didn't cramp, and I didn't fall unconscious. I swam doggedly to the surface, and dragged myself out onto the muddy bank around the edge of the waterfall's pond. The forest loomed above me, and I closed my eyes. There was nothing and then there were whispers, lots of them.

We're coming.

I'm coming.

You're safeâ€¦|..

We're always hunting you.

Look in the shadows, and you will see yourself.

Sssshâ€¦|..

Fate is not to be trifled with.

Do so, and your fate is in jeopardy.

I shook my head, slapping my ears. Nothing helped. The trees around me were shadowed in the rapidly failing light, and I thought I saw them move. Grow teeth, claws, jaws. I blinked. I took in a deep breath, although I couldn't die from not breathing.

The trees shrunk, into bears. They growled, black fur bristling. Beady eyes glared at me. I scrambled backwards, screaming. My stomach almost rose into my throat. I turned and fled, but I didn't hear the bears after me. I ran anyway. Then I saw John in the trees. I changed direction, running towards him. But I soon halted as I saw his face. His eyes were pits of black, his mouth a yawning gap - like the Scream's. I shrieked- turning and running away. Multiple Johns appeared and tried to grab me, their mouths gaping wider. My heart fluttered wildly as I ran endlessly through the forest, the sunset turned to night, and I soon couldn't see the tree roots I was tripping over. My stomach cramped at the thought of those eyeless Johns following me silently, and I forced myself up. Instantly, I fell over again. I was too weak to continue any further. I screamed for John with my mind, but I didn't sense the tell-tale feeling that meant my thought had been received. I shrieked and cried, falling into the blackness of sleep.

Maybe I might wake up at Oliver's house?

I slipped away into the abyss.

Uranila Territory

John

"_Halt!" Janasirak snarled._

_Seven wolves surrounded me and Stranakia. _

I bowed as Stranakia did.

"_Honourable Janasirak, we seek the aid of your healer," the Rhanaluka wolf said quietly._

"_What?" the pure white Uranila wolf snapped, "You don't look hurt!"_

I turned my mutilated back towards the lead border guard and his side-guards.

"_Ah. John is hurt, not you. Rise," Janasirak commanded. I stood slowly. I met the wolf's eyes, which were nearly the same colour as my own._

"_Frazwera is busy. We don't need interruptions," he said, not unkindly. _

Stranakia curled her muzzle in the beginnings of a snarl.

"_Uranila promised any injured wolf could seek help from the only healer!" she snapped._

"_John is not a wolf," he said with such perfect conviction that it sounded like he didn't care._

"_With all due respect _sir,_ the wolf packs _owe_ Emily and myself," I stated, "Are you so quick to forget we saved you all?"_

Janasirak didn't like that, obviously.

"_Such things are forgotten, with wolves. Uranila owes _no-one_" he snarled. _

Stranakia bowed again.

"_I apologize, Janasirak. We shall leave now."_

I didn't bow, and I didn't turn to leave. The Uranila border guard leader snarled, his blue eyes flashing.

I returned his growl, with a lower, more threatening tone. I met the wolf's eyes. I knew that direct eyes contact signals a challenge. His side-guards flinched slightly.

"_LEAVE!" he snarled. _

"_No."_

_Stranakia retreated into a bush, and fled. _

Coward.

Janasirak advanced, with his other guards spreading out to surround me.

"_I don't want to hurt you, human, but you give me no choice!"_

I drew my knife, and the wolves snarled in unison.

I was going to fight.

They snarled, and a bead of sweat broke out on my forehead, even in despite of the cold.

A wolf leapt- a beige colour. Yellow eyes flashed as I whirled around, and the wolf couldn't move out of the way fast enough as I drove the combat knife into its flank. It whimpered and fell to the ground. It didn't move as I withdrew the blade from its fur. Then I heard the scampering of paws, and everything moved in slow motion as the other six wolves leapt at me. I whirled around. Janasirak moved slowly. I'd leave him until last. I'd give him a chance to surrender. I picked a brown wolf, leapt forward, stabbed. A grey wolf leapt on me from behind and I rolled to the ground, crushing the howling wolf with over one hundred and thirty kilos of augmented muscle and bone. Four more to go. I dodged the leader as he leapt at me with a snarl. A silvery grey wolf, reminding me distractingly of Ezikal leapt at me. I felt a bit strange as I grabbed the wolf, and broke its neck. They were beautiful creatures I was killing, be they _d__eadly and intelligent._

Then I felt jaws closing on my neck, hot doggy breath dripping slobber all over me. I fell to the ground, trying to roll over the wolf, but the animal leapt clear. It was obviously smarter than that. Blood ran down my back as the bite marks on my neck oozed blood. My back hadn't started bleeding again, luckily. I leapt to my feet, slashing the wolf across the throat with the knife as it jumped at me and snarled.

The last side-guard.

But where was Janasirak?

I was knocked down as the white wolf barrelled into my legs. Jaws closed around my arm, and snapped shut. I felt the teeth puncture the skin and muscle, releasing blood.

_Janasirak obviously didn't know much about me, for I realised he expected the bone to snap and splinter under the force exerted by his jaw. His teeth went no further as my coated bones stopped his canines from penetrating. I flung the wolf away, his jaws releasing as I threw him away easily. The white wolf struggled to his feet, even as I staggered to my own. Fighting these wolves was almost harder than doing so with the Covenant. Janasirak growled, mean, low. Some age old animal instinct told me to run, but my mind was ruled too solely by conditioning and training. I simply couldn't retreat. I growled back, matching the tone. The white wolf bared his teeth and snarled, leaping at me faster than any alien. I slipped out of the way as the wolf latched onto my leg. Again, my bones halted any further penetration. Blood splattered the snow around the wolves I'd slaughtered, and fresh blood dripped from my arm. I reached down, grabbed the wolf and prised his jaws apart, flinging him into a tree.

_

_I'd give him one more chance to surrender. _

Janasirak dragged himself up, blood dripping from one of his ears and from a wound on his flank. The wolf was nearly completely red with the liquid now.

"_Stop this now!" a female wolf howled. A bluish grey wolf ran down from a snowy ridge, standing between me and Janasirak, "What are you doing? You are not to attack John or any human!"_

"_Frazwera! He wouldn't leave!" Janasirak snarled._

"_You stupid wolf! Ezikal just howled to me and told me of their arrival! John needs the healer, not a fight with you and your stupid side-guards!"_

"_Why didn't he howl earlier?!" Janasirak whined. _

"_Because Ezikal is not fool enough to bother me with my business! You disgust me!" Uranila is weaker now, no thanks to you and your idiotic actions!" she snarled, snapping at the white wolf. I relaxed, slumping against a tree. Stranakia emerged from a bush, and I realised she hadn't run away after all. Frazwera bit the back of Janasirak's neck and snarled, sending the white wolf limping away over the ridge, whimpering. _

My arm continued to bleed and I collapsed as the leg Janasirak had bitten gave way. Stranakia howled and licked my face. I pushed her away roughly, and tried to stand. I collapsed, again straight away. Frazwera padded over.

"_You need to come to the pack. I'm afraid our healer is too frail to make it more than five meters out here."_

_Stranakia snarled, "Do you think he can even _make_ it _three_ meters?" _

I struggled to my feet, bracing myself with my uninjured arm against the tree. I staggered a step. Pain lanced through my back, my leg and my neck ached as blood continued to flow out.

I made it five meters with the support of Frazwera and Stranakia. I reached the ridge, collapsing on the slope. The snow numbed the pain and I continued. I wasn't spent, not for a mile. I could have fought a hundred wolves and not gotten tired, but as always injuries halted a Spartan. Sometimes, for good. I staggered over the ridge. But I went over too fast. I tumbled down, like a giant, limp snowball. The white stuff went up my nose, in my mouth. I finally stopped, and dragged myself upright. Thirteen wolves of different colours stared at me with wide eyes. I didn't move. I didn't think I could, anyway. Frazwera stood next to me, dragging me by the collar towards what looked like nests. The pack's home was a three meter deep depression in a snowy field, the so called "nests" created by leaves and sticks woven into tunnels and deep bowls. There were snow caves too- probably for the lesser wolves. Stranakia dragged my other side. Frazwera guided me over to a tunnel nest- bigger than the rest; the entrance at least a meter high. I crawled inside. Instantly, there was no freezing wind, no cold air. It was warm, the floor coated with fur and feathers. I lay there, not moving. Frazwera growled,

"_The healer needs to be fetched. She is eating. You'll need to wait."_

_I still dripped blood on the floor. _

The main body of the tunnel widened out into a dome shaped roof much like an igloo's and about the same size. I closed my eyes, and soon I fell into a sleep that I didn't see coming.

Dream World

Emily

I woke up as the sun hit my face. My throat ached from screaming all last night, but I didn't feel hungry, or thirsty. I dragged myself upright and yawned. Sunlight framed the trees as dawn broke, and I saw mountains in the distance.

Henryk must be very powerful to create such a large world. If he could do that, he shouldn't have too much trouble finding me. I yelled out for John with my mind, but I didn't receive an answer. If the Spartan could help it he'd always answer. I stood, my runners crunching leaves loudly. They were ripped and torn, and so were my jeans and T-shirt.

If it was a dream world, maybe I could think up new things? From some fantasy novels I've read, I decided I'd give it a go. It didn't matter if it didn't work. My feet wouldn't blister, anyway. I'd just be naked.

I imagined my favourite shirt, white, with a black owl on it. Cotton. Soft. I thought, hard, hard, harder-

Then I felt the material in my hands. I opened my eyes, hardly believing it. I quickly took off my old shirt and slipped my imagined one on. I kept my jeans, because they were the least damaged. Shoes, next. I thought hard, and I had an identical pair, except they weren't ripped and torn. I put those on, and whooped. Take that Henryk! I continued my endless trek through the forest and towards the mountains. I didn't know what I was doing anymore. I couldn't escape the dream world, couldn't die. I couldn't go back to Henryk, either.

I hated how he said it was okay that I'd kill everyone on the Infinity. It wasn't okay! I stepped over a tree root and came face to face with John. This time, his eyes weren't pits and his mouth wasn't a gaping hole. Except he was still very, very wrong. His eyes were blank- too blank. The only way I could think of them was like they were space. Empty, a void. He stood in a neutral position, towering over me. He didn't move as I ignored him and walked around the guy. Except he was there, again- in front of me as soon as I passed him. Blocking my way. I stumbled into his chest and fell onto my bottom. I clenched my hands into fists and punched the figure. It did nothing. Even punching the _real_ John would have caused a reaction. This did nothing, there was no change in posture, expression and his clothes didn't even depress like the real John's would have. But it felt like I'd punched an electric fence. I yelled, leapt backwards and rubbed my fist. The fake-John still stood there. I ran past him, but there he was again, in front of me. I dodged, and again he appeared, still, expressionless. I ran, dodging, passing until I broke free from the forest.

I stood on the bank of a huge lake, the water flat like glass. Steep cliffs bordered the whole body of water, unclimbable. The only way in or out was the terrifying forest I'd just went through.

And I was most definitely not going through that forest again.

What could I use to get out?

I could image a rope to throw up onto the cliffs, but I didn't have a belayer or anyone to tie the rope securely and I didn't know how to make lasso.

A submarine wouldn't get me anywhere. Then it hit me.

What about a seaplane? I could sort of fly a plane. I thought of a Cessna floatplane from flight sim, but the memory was too hazy to use. I ran through a list of planes, until I stumbled upon the Consolidated PBV-1 Catalina. Big, slow, and probably easier to fly than a smaller aircraft. I ran over to the edge of the lake and imagined the big warplane's hull, like a boat's. Then the small glass cockpit, the gunner turrets on either side of the classic tail, and the big wingspan. The two small engines placed on the middle, and the folded up landing gear. Then I opened my eyes.

And it was there, the engines off, everything just as I'd imagined it. It bobbed in the water peacefully. The mid-day sun glinted off the gunner turret's glass and the cockpit shone. I'd have to swim to it, however. It was about ten meters offshore. I took off my runners and waded in. I reached the right side of the fuselage and felt along it for the step ladder, which I'd imagined extended. I kicked it, and it was underneath the water. I felt along the side of the cockpit for the door, which I found and opened. It opened downwards, and I stepped on it and then inside, settling on the furthest seat away from me; the pilot in command's seat, on the far left.

I gaped as I saw the amount of levers, buttons and instruments- I recognised the familiar altimeter, airspeed indicator and rotations per minute, which there were two of, for each engine. There was also manifold pressure, although I had no real inkling of what that meant. The red lever above my head was obviously the mixture lever, to control the amount of fuel and air mixed. It was closed, which meant there was no fuel allowed in. I opened it. The throttles were probably the two levers next to the mixture lever, I stuck both open slightly. I didn't know how to start the thing, though. There was a big red button so I pushed it.

I jumped as the two engines roared into life, the plane charging forward. I frantically pulled my seat all the way to the rudder pedals and pushed on them, guiding the big warplane out onto the lake. The control yolk was essentially a car steering wheel. I pushed the throttles forward and the engines roared louder, the water rushing past. I used the plane's rudder, as the Catalina didn't have a water rudder like a boat's, only the vertical control surface on the tail.

I decided I'd pull up at one hundred knots.

Fifty five.

Seventy.

Eighty.

Ninety.

One hundred.

I pulled back gently on the steering wheel, keeping the plane from lurching sideways with little rudder inputs. I put the nose on the horizon and let it climb, speed increasing to about one hundred and twenty knots. The plane felt big and heavy, cumbersome compared to the small training aircraft I flew. I was really nervous- essentially it was my first solo flight, I observed wryly. I levelled off at three thousand feet, which took about ten minutes. The remains of the water slid past the windscreen and flew off somewhere. I lowered the throttle a little and levelled out, finding the trim wheel and turning it. The small tab on the elevator would be popping out, I knew, and helping to hold the big floatplane's attitude. I found a rudder trim, too- but I decided I'd leave that. I checked the oil temperatures, just to make sure that the Catalina wasn't overheating at all. It wasn't, so I was content to leave the warplane be. I closed my eyes, the big plane bouncing gently over a puff of turbulence. I looked behind me and saw some sort of passage way leading to the gunner turrets- I decided they were worth a look. I double checked the Catalina, increasing the pitch upwards trim so the plane would climb slightly. I also increased the throttle, so it wouldn't stall. I walked down the length of the plane and reached the two glass pods on either side of the tail. Wind rushed past and into the slots for the guns. I smiled as it ruffled my pony tail. The twin engines roared overhead. Clouds drifted serenely, and the Catalina's wing skimmed one gently.

Then I started in surprise as I saw the other two planes. I saw the white colours, the red spots on the wings and the black engines as they emerged, screaming from cloud cover with deadly intent.

Zeroes.

What kind of sick joke was Henryk playing? They were the feared Japanese fighters from the Pacific War. I didn't create them, and he was the only other one in this freakish dream world. I didn't know how to work the guns, didn't know if they were loaded, if I'd imagined them working. Instead, I thought hard of two gunners, American. I didn't specify hair colours, eye colours, or anything only an age and a size.

Twenty five, medium sized, fit. And there they were, firing bravely at the Zeroes; red browning bullets arcing towards the mean-looking fighters. I ran back to the cockpit, and unwheeled the trim. Full throttle, full mixture. I rolled the Catalina viciously to the side, weaving and dodging. I wouldn't let Henryk's planes get a clear shot on my two brave gunners. Orange Zero tracers flew over the cockpit and the airframe shook as the warplane absorbed the bullets.

"Reloading!" A gunner called.

I redoubled my efforts to avoid the Zeroes, rolling, ruddering, twisting. The warplane was slow to respond, as heavy and large as it was, but it followed my commands as well as it could. A bullet broke through the cockpit, whizzing just past my head and skimming the

instruments. It ricocheted and bounced off the thick metal floor, landing near my foot. I screamed with anger, my cries drowned out by the Catalina's roaring engines.

"Reloaded!" the gunner cried again. Tears sprang forward, and I turned my head to look down the length of the plane to the gunner pods, just in time as a gunner claimed one Zero out of the two.

"Bogey down!" he crowed. The fireball disintegrated. Both gunners now focused their fire on the last Zero, but the pilot was obviously smarter. He guided his nimble fighter exactly down the middle of the tail, a blind spot; as each gunner was on either side. The guns couldn't rotate to shoot on that arc. I realised, and kicked the rudder pedals, yawing the whole plane viciously, the nose slewing right, and the tail kicking out to the left. The gunner of the right turret crowed happily and fired on the surprised Zero. Orange tracers arced forward, before he could aim, piercing the gunner's chest. Blood sprayed on the gun pod's glass and I nearly hurled on the floor. I yelled angrily.

"Gunner down!" the other gunner yelled. I rolled and weaved the Catalina again, allowing the left gunner a shot. I heard the guns over the roar of the engines, and I decided to try a risky tactic. I closed the throttles, slowing the big warplane so quickly so the Zero drew close. His guns wouldn't converge properly and he missed all his shots. However, my remaining gunner had the best shot and my eyesight was good enough to see the blood splatter across the Zero's cockpit.

The gunner had killed the pilot. I shivered, and levelled out the Catalina and trimmed it. I lowered the throttle as I noticed the engine temperatures creeping into the red. I'd climbed, during the engagement, now I was at five thousand feet and the air rushing in from the gun turrets was a little colder.

What was I going to do with the other gunner? How damaged was my plane? How much fuel did I have? Where would I land?

All of these things rushed through my mind frantically. The sun began to slowly creep across the sky, edging towards the sunset stage. The blue sky and clouds seemed peaceful, but how long was it until Henryk sent more planes? I called out to the gunner.

"You okay back there?"

"Roger, skipper! Keeping an eye out for other bogeys, ma'am," he responded.

He didn't seem to realise that I was the only other person, the other gunner was dead, or he was in some sort of dream world.

"Can you see the damage from there?" I yelled over the engines.

"Minor damage to the tail from what I can see, and the other gun is totally ruined. The wings are a little beat up, but I think she'll fly fine. The engines are okay, they aren't leaking anything," he replied.

I looked outside, seeing the mountains go past. Their peaks were topped with clouds, and they were barely one thousand meters away from the tip of the Catalina's wing. The air grew chilly, and I reasoned that the gun pods should have slides to close the slots for the barrel.

"You mind closing those holes back there?" I called, "It's getting a bit chilly!"

"Yes ma'am!"

The air blowing through was cut off abruptly.

I checked the fuel gauges; I'd only used about a quarter and I'd only been flying for about an hour. That fuel wouldn't last forever, and I wasn't sure how I'd imagine up some fuel to put in. I called out to the gunner- I needed some company.

"Come up here!" I yelled over the engines.

"Yes ma'am!"

The gunner removed himself from his turret and stalked stiffly down the passageway leading to the cockpit. He sat next to me, looking out the cockpit to the right. I didn't get to see his face because he did this.

"Look at me," I asked.

As he turned his head, his face changed into John's. I stared in disbelief, and John's icy blue eyes stared back evenly.

"John? Is that really you?" I stammered.

The weird John's eyebrow rose in that infuriating way, like I was stupid or dumb.

"I'm just your subconscious thoughts. I'm not the real John, not in the way you want," he said matter-of-factly, "I'm only your tortured mind trying to comfort itself. I can be cruel, if I want, I can be kind if I choose," he said ominously. I could already tell by the way he was speaking that it wasn't John. I looked into the fake-John's eyes. He seemed a bit disinterested, like I was a cockroach in a zoo.

"You won't find any comfort in me. After all, that's not what you want right now, is it?" he said.

Of course that's what I wanted right now. I wanted someone to protect me and comfort me and help me. But then, I didn't really know if that was what my subconscious wanted, as the not-John had said. I blinked at him, and then pinched his arm to make sure he was really there. He continued to watch me evenly with an intense gaze.

"Go away," I said angrily. I didn't want John if it wasn't actually John himself.

"I can't just disappear. I'm your gunner. You imagined me."

"I didn't imagine you! The gunner turned into you! If you're not

really John, I don't want to talk to you or have you here to play mind games with me!"

"I'm not playing any games. You're the one yelling," he said calmly.

"Get back down to the gun! I don't want to talk to you!"

"Don't despise me. Your own mind created me, don't forget," he said, standing and stalking back down the passageway. I watched his form shrink, and I guessed that he'd returned to the gun. I shivered. Everything in Henryk's world was so wrong. Even my friends; what was the pilot trying to do to me? Any more of this and I was pretty sure I'd have a heart attack. I noticed the Catalina trying to climb, and levelled out the nose again. I didn't want to get too high, because I didn't know if this thing had oxygen and I didn't see any thick flying suits to shield me from the cold. The gunner already had one of his own.

Then I noticed the fuel indicator ticking down rapidly, and I stared in alarm as it dropped down to half suddenly. I called to the gunner,

"Are we leaking anything?"

I watched as he craned his head around to look up at the wing and engines.

"No ma'am, we're all good!"

Now the gauge had only one quarter of the fuel left. Henryk must be doing this, somehow. I began a slight descent, trying to get a little bit of airspeed before the engines spluttered and died from lack of fuel. I peered out of the cockpit, straining my eyes against the now setting dreamland sun. The clouds were dyed orange and the sky darkened, turning pink. I saw my landing site- the lake had continued on for some time, not narrowing at all. It wound like a snake on the left of the Catalina. I was at three thousand feet now, and the fuel was nearly empty.

The right engine coughed, revving wildly, and then cutting out. The rest of the fuel went to the left engine, which kept purring resolutely for another five minutes, and then cut out also.

"Ma'am? What's going on?"

"I don't know! The fuel is being drained and I've run out!"

"We must've had a sneaky leak!" he cried.

He didn't even know it wasn't anything remotely like a leak.

One thousand feet, now and I made sure the airspeed didn't get too high, at a slow one hundred and fifty knots. I saw the edge of the lake, and guided the big warplane over it. I closed the throttle and waited for the Catalina to slow down. I didn't really know how to land on water, so I decided I'd take it slow. The big plane teetered on the verge of stalling, just above the water. I lowered the nose, and the Catalina stalled gently onto the crystal surface of the lake. Water splashed everywhere as the plane slowed down. There wasn't any

brake to make the stopping any easier, only the resistance of the water would help slow the warplane. Eventually, the plane stopped about two kilometres offshore.

I opened the door and peered out. The lake was so clear, I could see the bottom about fifty feet under, and I felt a bit sick seeing how deep it was. The gunner peered over my shoulder, and I got a good look at his face as he wasn't wearing John's. He looked about the age I'd imagined, around twenty one. He had short brown hair and green eyes, and a crooked, lazy smile that looked a bit cute. He patted me on the shoulder good naturedly.

"Good landing, I must say!" he said in his American accent.

"But now we have to swim to shore, and I'm not sure I can swim that far without help. I can't exactly die but not breathing is kind of disturbing."

"Maybe I could assist with that," said the gunner, but this time in John's deep, brassy tones. I knew what I expected as I turned around. There was the fake-John, watching me with those reserved eyes.

"I was _sure _I didn't want you to appear then," I snapped.

"Maybe you didn't. But your consciousness did," he replied.

"Why would you help me anyway? You said you could be cruel. You're just my imagination, how can you help me?" I spat.

"Maybe I want to be kind, this time. Didn't you know your imagination created this plane? You can fly it, can't you? There is no reason why I can't help you, then," he said flatly.

I glared.

Should I even let him help me? He could let me get exhausted- let me sit on the bottom of the lake, I couldn't die, but I certainly didn't think it would be enjoyable. Even five hundred meters would be a marathon for me, let alone two _kilometres._ I decided I didn't really have a choice. I ran my hand absentmindedly over the Catalina's wet fuselage. I didn't really want to leave the big warplane; I'd grown attached to it. John obviously knew.

"It'll still be here. You can't de-imagine things," he said.

"Yeah, but will I remember where it is?" I muttered to myself.

"It's part of your imagination. You'll know where it is," the fake-John replied.

"Fine. I'll let you help me. I don't know how I can imagine up fuel, so I suppose we'll just have to leg it."

"So you're including me, then?"

I realised I'd said "we'll".

"Yeah, but I don't know how that'll develop so don't push it!" I snapped. The fake-John opened his mouth to speak, but he obviously thought better of it- closing it again. He jumped off the side of the

Catalina, and splashed into the water. He sunk, of course; he was obviously the same weight as the real John. He watched me. Waiting. I sighed and threw myself in, squealing at the cold water.

It shocked me so much I forgot to swim or breathe and I sank like a stone. I felt strong hands under my arms and I was pulled forcefully to the surface, spluttering in a breath even though I knew I didn't need one.

"Gosh, that's cold," I said, cracking open an eye. I met the fake-John's instantly and he seemed somewhat amused.

"You'll have to deal with it if I'm going to swim you to shore."

"Be quiet," I replied.

I struck out, swimming by myself. The Spartan kept pace with a reserved gaze and occasionally offered insults about my swimming style.

I splashed water at him whenever he did so. After about one hundred meters, I couldn't go any further and I floated limply on my back, resting. I wouldn't ruin my pride with John helping me swim. I wanted to do it myself.

But of course, just like the real John, if he wanted to do something, he would do it. I felt his hands on my arms, pulling me after him as he swam. I struggled; water was getting up my nose.

"Hey! What are you-?"

He pulled me down slightly and water went over my head. I couldn't see because water was getting into my mouth, up my nose and everywhere else. I spluttered back up to the surface, opening an eye warily.

"What did you do that for?!" I cried angrily.

"It's the only way to get you to be quiet!" he replied, just as annoyed.

I shut my mouth and let him swim for me. Eventually, I felt hard pebbles under my feet and I stood up, retching water everywhere weakly.

"I am never going swimming with any John, real or not!" I spat. The fake-John didn't even seem to be tired, just breathing a little faster than usual. He watched me with a deprecating expression.

"I think there's something you should say," he said suggestively.

"I'm not in the mood to do anything," I said, flopping onto the sand.

"Thâ€|.Tha..n?" he began.

"What? Oh. Thank you, I guess."

I squinted, looking at the Catalina out on the lake. The water

glinted off its fuselage, and the sunlight shone on the water through the holes on its wings. I heard a shuffling noise next to me and I turned my head to see John settle down beside me. Water still dripped from his wet flying suit and from his hair, and he looked a little annoyed at the droplets getting into his eyes.

I shook my own hair, flinging water everywhere. I stopped to find him watching me.

"I really would prefer it if you _didn't_ _wet_ me again," he said flatly.

"You're the one who dragged me two kilometres through the water," I retorted.

"That was completely necessary."

"You didn't have to all of a sudden grab me. You could have been trying to drown me for all I knew, and you're very lucky I can't die," I replied venomously.

He even looked a bit hurt at this.

"I would never _kill_ you," he said disbelievingly.

"As far as I can tell, you're not really John and I don't know your motives."

"I might not be the John you remember, but I still wouldn't kill you. I don't have any motives. I'm your gunner- it's kind of my job to not have any. I follow orders from you."

I blinked. So the fake-John could be hurt, just like the real one.

"You're right. I'm judging you too much. I'm sad, and lonely andâ€|. And, I'm trapped in this world, and I don't know what to do," I sniffed.

John looked at me for a moment.

"You've got a body, out of this world, and a life. You believe that, and you can break free," he said.

This John really _was_ different to the real one.

"I can't die, I can't get hurt, I've tried everything but I still can't _wake up!_" _ I said, distraught.

The fake-John looked at the sky blankly.

"Only Henryk will be able to set you free," he said, looking at me reservedly, "If you're going to get out of here, you'll have to convince him."

"Butâ€|You're my conscience so you should know thisâ€|. But if I or John goes back to the Infinity, we'll destroy her and kill everyone on board. And Henryk thinks it's okay, like there's nothing I can do, but I _can_ do something I just don't know what yet. It's ripping me apart," I said sadly.

"I can help you, although the things I can do are limited," he replied, "After all, I'm just your imagination. My limits are limited by your capacity."

I looked at the Spartan. Then I hugged him.

"You'd really help me like that? I mean, you kind of have no choiceâ€¦|Butâ€¦|"

The fake-John offered me a half smile, which looked kind of awkward on his serious features. I'd never seen the actual John smile before, so this was new. I smiled back. He obviously didn't like smiling either, for his facial muscles twitched slightly. It was probably for my own benefit.

He let the smile fade.

"Dry us off. If we're going to find a way to get out of here, we'll have to move quicker. Being wet will only slow us down," he said.

I closed my eyes. Maybe if I thought of warm weather, which might work.

I imagined the fake-John, and me, dry, clothes ruffling in the wind. Hot sun, hot wind. I thought hard, harder, harder-

"That's enough!" he said.

I snapped open my eyes to see the Spartan sweating profusely.

"You made it too hot!" he exclaimed. He quickly stripped off the thick flying suit, which I noticed looked a bit burnt. I grinned sheepishly.

I decided I'd imagine this John in the real one's casual UNSC clothing. I wanted this John to be as comforting as possible; to help stabilise me. After all, he was really the only thing I had right now that was close to a friend.

"Wha-?"

And there he was, wearing the long sleeved grey shirt and black nylon pants.

But this John looked supremely miffed.

"I'm not a model for you to dress up!"

I glared.

"If you're going to help me, I'm going to need some sort of emotional support. Being dressed up in the stuff that the person I trust most wears, I'm going to feel a whole lot safer," I snapped.

"I feel like some sort of stress toy," he sighed, "I'm not chiefly here to comfort you, I'm also here to be mean to you, to sharpen you. I'm warning you now; nothing can control your subconsciousness, so don't be surprised if I'm nasty!" he said, exasperated.

"It's hard being an image for my consciousness isn't it?" I laughed.

"You have no idea," he sighed.

I stood, brushed the sand off my clothes and began walking towards the forest around the edge of the lake. Huge pine trees towered over my head and small ferns struggled through the needles that the trees dropped, the air smelt sweet and clean and for once I felt calm and happy. The fake-John walked quietly beside me, offering no comment. I didn't expect any. This John was vastly different than the real one; different personality, different mannerisms, and it seemed, different way of thinking. I was a little nervous for when he was mean, as he'd warned- the real John had never been mean like he was suggesting. Sure, the Spartan had his moments but I was still worried.

The fake-John pulled me suddenly towards him and I realised I'd nearly walked into a bristly pine tree.

"Ugh! Thanks!"

"Don't get used to it," he said ominously.

"Do you know what I'm thinking?" I asked.

"Yesâ€¦.The stuff deep inside, the stuff you don't _think _you're thinking."

"That's kind of creepy," I shivered.

"Don't be scared. I don't know what you're thinking, not like the real John does anyway," he said. I gave him a look and continued. I didn't feel hungry, because I didn't need food, just like I didn't need air or I couldn't die. I heard the not-John emit a strange sound, and I turned to look.

He'd stopped suddenly, and was standing three meters behind me. His expression looked faintly tortured, and his eyes were shadowed.

"Hey! Whatcha doin?" I called.

"I..Iâ€¦Yourâ€¦," he stammered.

"Are you going mean on me?"

He nodded.

"I can'tâ€¦.Fight it. I'm sorry," he said in a different, lower voice. Now, the blue in his irises had faded. It was nearly impossible to tell where the pupil started and the iris began; his eyes were that dark. I shivered- his eyes were just pits of black now and I fought the urge to scream and run. There wasn't even that coldness in his eyes that the blue gave, there was just nothing. I backed away.

"You can run, but you can never hide from _him._ He'll find you, wherever you flee," he said meanly.

I gulped.

"Gosh, I'm going to be so relieved when this is over," I muttered.

"It'll never be over. Even when I'm good again, I can change at any time and torment you until your last breath," he taunted.

"_Shut up!"_ I yelled.

He advanced, barely one meter away now. His eyes bored into my own, alien and black. My defiance melted away like a snowman in summer. I turned, and I ran. Branches whipped in my face, stinging my eyes and tripping me. Roots tangled my feet.

"So the weakling decides to run," mocked the fake-John's voice all around me, echoing through the dense forest.

"Shut up, shut up, and shut up!" I whispered.

I emerged into a clearing, sunlight breaking through a gap in the gigantic pine trees. The grass was muddy, and one of my feet instantly sunk at least three foot into the ground. I screamed. It was like quicksand, except- quickgrass. I tried to pull my foot free, but it wouldn't budge. It sunk in even further as I tried again and again to free it. My other foot met the surface of the quickgrass and sunk also.

"Eeeek! Help me?! Anyone?"

If I got trapped in the quickgrass I wouldn't die but I wouldn't be able to get free, either. I turned my head to see the fake-John watching me.

"_Help _me!" I yelled at him.

He smirked and made no move to assist me.

Meanwhile, I'd sunk up to my stomach. The quickgrass was warm, and squishy just like quicksand. I turned to look at the John again.

"Remember, you said you wouldn't kill me? Well this is just as good as killing me, even if I can't die!" I said desperately.

I thought I saw the very edge of his eyes lighten slightly, allowing a tiny hint of blue.

"You promised you'd help me, didn't you? I trust you!" I said, encouraged.

He shook his head like there was a bothersome bug annoying him.

"Noâ€|No you can't do thisâ€|I'm your consciousness, talking to me won't work!"

He didn't sound confident, he sounded like he was trying to reassure himself. He looked at me, and I saw the sliver of blue grow a little. I was, or he was, beating back the evil that my subconsciousness was thinking about.

"You've got to help me, or I won't trust you, ever again. Never ever," I threatened.

Now my chest went under. He still wouldn't move. Now my neckâ€¦I tilted my head back so I could breathe. Even though I knew I couldn't die the instinct to breathe was still strong and I couldn't ignore it. I closed my eyes as the quickgrass went over my head.

Strong hands grabbed me under the arms, lifting me from the wet, sticky death-trap. I gasped in a not needed breath and sighed. My saviour laid me out on a patch of grass that wasn't quickgrass, and I looked up at the fake-John, his eyes somewhat friendly and blue again. I laughed.

"Thought I was a goner, then!" I smiled, "Thanks."

He looked a bit ashamed of himself.

"I'm truly sorry about that."

"It wasn't your fault. I mean, I'm not sitting on the bottom of a pit of wet muddy stuff so that's okay in my book," I replied, "Plus I know you didn't want to. I knew you fought it."

He didn't look convinced.

"If you say so."

He helped me to my feet.

"We've still got to find Henryk," I said urgently.

He nodded.

Uranila Camp

John

I started awake as something wet and slimy was deposited on my wolf bites, scratches and the burns I'd sustained from the Light. I struggled to sit up but I quickly heard a wolf growl.

"_Stay still! I can't help you if you're thrashing all over the place!"_

It was an old wolf with a croaky voice and a frail timbre. I could hear its wheezing breath and decided it was probably the healer.

"_Rosamina?" I asked._

"_That's me. Now be quiet so I can put more dressing on your injuries," she said firmly. _

_I recognised an important being even when I heard it, so I did as she asked. _

She spat another load of wet slimy stuff on a particularly sore burn, and I hissed in pain.

"_Can't you be more _gentle?_" I snapped._

Usually, I wouldn't feel much pain but my tolerance had been worn down with all the fighting. My temper had frayed slightly, too.

"_If you want your wounds treated, be silent and deal with it or I won't even bother!" she croaked back fiercely, spitting another wad of wet stuff onto me._

I hissed again.

"_You're done! Now stay in that position until I say you can get up! I don't want the dressings to come off," she said cantankerously.

_

I growled slightly, and she returned it. I heard her pad outside, and I sighed. I couldn't fall asleep again; the healer's dressings had aggravated my wounds and now they stung or burnt like fire.

I heard another set of footsteps and another wolf pushed through the tunnel, the branches rustling. I couldn't see, because I was on my stomach and facing inwards- but I could hear as well as anything.

"_Hello, John," Stranakia yipped happily._

I didn't reply as I held back yet another hiss of pain.

"_Hello?" she repeated._

"_Hello, Stranakia," I replied through gritted teeth._

She obviously realised my anger.

"_Don't worry. She'll come back in about half a deer leap and let you get up," she said encouragingly. _

"_She'd better, or I'll put one of her disgusting dressings on her face," I growled._

Stranakia barked with laughter,

"_You'd better not. That might have some undesirable consequences."_

"_I've dealt with them before. I think I could do it again," I said flatly._

Stranakia snorted, and I heard the leaves on the floor crunch as she settled down near the entrance.

"_Any news from Ezikal?" I asked._

"_He howled while you were asleep, to Frazwera. He was asking if you'd arrived yet. Of course, Frazwera said yes, you were here and getting treated."_

"_I'm surprised I didn't wake up," I said._

"_Probably after fighting all those Uranila wolves," she grunted._

"_Tell Frazwera I'm sorry for killing her warriors."_

"_She doesn't mind. It was Janasirak's own fault they died. He was headstrong and reckless and trashed the rule that we don't attack humans, especially _you_, " she growled._

_I was a little startled as a loud crashing emitted from the tunnel, accompanied by loudly uttered strange words. I guessed they were wolf obscenities. _

"_Rosamina!" Stranakia gasped._

"_Why is everyone so surprised to see me? I'm just an old she-wolf!" she said crankily._

"_Can I get up yet?" I asked, somewhat irritated. _

"_Yes, yes of course. The dressings should have dried on by now," she said disinterestedly. _

_I sat up swiftly, slightly annoyed at the dry _stuff_ attached to me. I resisted the urge to scrape it off. I still sat facing the wrong way, trying to get a grip on the annoying sticky wet stuff that hampered my every move._

"_What exactly did you put on me?" I asked warily._

Rosmina snorted.

"_Just a few plants and tree bark. Don't worry its nothing poisonous or particularly disgusting. Besides the few wolf droppings, to keep it together," she said._

Wolf-?

Forget it. I don't even want to think about it, I growled to myself.

"Thanks,_" I said sarcastically._

Stranakia barked with laughter, and Rosamina snorted.

"_That's often the usual reaction, when my patients find out they've been plastered with wolf poo," she huffed. _

I turned around finally, wanting to glare at the old healer. There was Stranakia, the white she wolf's muzzle curled in sympathy, orange eyes amused. And then I saw Rosmina. She was small, and had black fur streaked with silver. Scars lined her pelt and marred her snout, twisting her muzzle and lips- I couldn't look her in the eye for they were clouded over, blank expressionless pools of silvery-white. I cocked my head slightly at that, and then decided she was probably so old she should be blind. I stayed silent.

"_That's also often the usual reaction when my patients see my face," she said, not at all bitter as I expected._

_I didn't feel any sympathy. I couldn't anyway, and if I could, I still wouldn't have. It seemed like the old wolf didn't need it. Stranakia twisted her muzzle in what looked like a wolfish smile.

_

"_Does it hurt?" she asked._

"_Not anymore. It did, though," I replied._

It was true. After the pain had gone, I'd been able to build up the barriers I had against pain. Even now, if it did hurt; it wouldn't trouble me. Rosamina snorted once again, and then stomped out of the tunnel.

"_You'd better come outside. Patients tend to get sicker if they stay cooped up for too long. And I don't mean flu, or injury sick. I mean crazy."_

"_I highly doubt that'll happen to me," I replied flatly. Stranakia howled with laughter and followed Rosamina out. I crawled carefully through the narrow tunnel. I didn't think the old healer would appreciate it if I trampled her work space._

The bitingly cold air hit me like a Covenant alien. I staggered for a moment- my thin rags were a poor excuse for clothes, now. Even my tough nylon pants had been ripped and torn. Janasirak's teeth hadn't helped with that, either.

"_Weakling. Not used to the cold yet," Rosamina said amusedly, obviously hearing my stumbling. I glared at her menacingly, even though I knew she couldn't see my expression. I shook my head, exasperated. _

"_Maybe if I was _clothed_ a little more it would make some sort of difference," I hissed back._

"_And I can help with that," said another wolf behind me. I turned to see Frazwera watching me, "Our hunts brought back two deer in the past hour. We haven't eaten yet, so you can salvage the skin. I'd hurry- My wolves are slavering all over the place get to them. Ezikal told me about your plight," she said, flicking her tail behind her.

_

Just as she'd promised, two fat deer lay sprawled on the ground; and also as she'd said wolves surrounded the bodies. Drool also dripped from their muzzles. I made my way over, sinking irritatingly into the snow. The wolves whimpered at me, clearly urging me to hurry up. I drew my knife, the blade glittering harshly in the mid-day sun, and several of the wolves growled. I examined the deer carefully. Its slender legs lay sprawling awkwardly and its eyes stared dumbly at the sky, and I decided its neck would be the easiest place to start skinning it.

It was messy work, but the two deer were quickly skinned. I held the pelts up, and the wolves whimpered again. I wondered why they weren't tucking in, and I looked curiously at Frazwera.

"_You were the first animal that wasn't a hunter to touch the prey. Therefore, you are the owner. You'll have to give them permission,"

she growled._

_I gestured to the deer distractedly. _

The wolves rushed forward in a howling, yelping, barking mass, and the deer soon disappeared under the multi-coloured swarm. Frazwera joined in, too, and so did Stranakia and Rosamina. Even though the wolf was blind, she snapped at anything that wouldn't allow her to reach the carcass. I moved away. They were obviously in a frenzy, and who knows, maybe I could get mistaken for food and pounced on. I sat awkwardly in the cold snow and examined the deer pelts. I'd managed to not get too much blood on the skin on the underside- but it still needed to be cleaned. I got up and headed towards the ridge, climbing up the steep snowy slope to get out of the wolves' home. As I climbed the ridge, I looked back at the feeding wolves. Their makeshift stick and leaf homes stood out starkly against the snow, and I found myself wondering how many soldiers it would take to destroy the wolves' home. I shook myself. No UNSC soldiers would be coming here anytime soon. I made it over the ridge and descended into the forest, utterly silent.

I listened for the sound of running water, straining my ears and cursing at the loud sound of my own breathing. I held my breath.

_There it was- far away and faint, but still there and it sounded at least five hundred meters away. I turned towards the trickling sound and trudged through the snow. _

_I nearly fell into the small creek. It had half frozen over, the edges crisp with ice and frost. The water glittered, and I dipped in the deer skins. They stiffened immediately with the cold, and I scrubbed the blood off quickly, careful not to let my hands touch the freezing water. Eventually, the gore was gone and I set the skins out to dry. I shivered a little. Then I sneezed. Now _that_ was unusual .I hadn't sneezed for years, I rarely got sick. I shook my head ruefully. After the stuff to do with the light, I shouldn't be shocked anymore by anything. I picked up the deer skins and headed back to the ridge. I stumbled up the slope, hampered by the huge surface area of the half frozen deer skins, slapping wetly against me. I nearly fell down the steep slope as I'd done when I'd arrived. Instead, I slipped and slid down it on my back, _then_ tumbling head over heels as I encountered a deep drift of snow near the entrance of the Uranila pack's home. I face planted into the snow as I slid into the camp. I scrambled upright, sniffing wildly as I tried to get snow out of my nose and mouth, and I heard a chorus of amused barks._

I turned to find every single wolf in Uranila howling with laughter. Stranakia staggered out from a group of wolves and stumbled over to me, in fits of yips and high pitched barks.

"_Is that your signature entrance? By that, I mean failing! Horribly!" she howled._

"_Easy for you to say. _You've_ got four legs," I stated flatly.

_

Frazwera followed the white wolf, her growls of amusement much more under control.

"_He does have a point; don't be too hard on him. I mean, he is a human after all," she barked._

"_Barely," I hissed, a little hurt at the reminder of how different I was. How _inhuman_ I was._

_Stranakia's reply was to leap on me and lick my face, yipping excitedly. _

"_Hey!" _

"_Shut up and deal with it!" she said, punctuating her sentence by giving me a huge lick, starting at my chin and ending at my forehead. I pushed her off, scrambling away and holding the deer pelts in front of me like a shield. The Uranila wolves howled with laughter. I ignored them; instead looking at the snow beneath my feet, giving me an idea- I secretly gathered a clump within my hands, rolling it into a ball and throwing it at Stranakia. The white she-wolf didn't see what was coming quickly enough, the snowball landing right between her eyes. She yelped in surprise and skipped away._

"_What was that for?!" she barked indignantly. _

"_For the slobber you dripped all over me," I replied flatly._

Frazwera howled her amusement, and then called for a halt.

"_Enough funny business! John, you'll need to soften those pelts before you cut them into _anything_ resembling clothes. Otherwise, you'll spoil the hide," she growled._

Rosamina pushed towards me from a group of wolves.

"_Outta my way you scallywags!" she snarled. She stalked up to me, sniffing. She completed a full round inspection of sniffing then came to stand in front of me, her sightless eyes bulging. _

"_You'll heal fine. Nothings infected and the wounds are closing nicely," she grunted._

_She could tell all that by _smelling?

Well, I suppose I could judge an enemy's whole approach by just hearing their footsteps, so why shouldn't her nose be her tool?

I felt a little tired. The long trek, the fight with Janasirak and his wolves, and the freezing cold had all worn down my reserves of strength. I rose to my feet, picking up the deer hides.

"_Can one of your wolves chew this for me?" I asked._

"_Of course," Frazwera barked, "Lupuan!"_

_A young wolf emerged from a group. _

"_Frazwera?" he asked shyly._

"_The honourable John needs someone to soften his deer hides. Would

you be willing to chew on them for him?"_

The silvery grey wolf's yellow eyes lit up.

"_Such an honour! Of course, Frazwera! I shall chew all day and all night," he said, rushing forward to stand in front of me._

"_Sir?" he asked._

I dropped the hides in front of him and he hurriedly scooped them off the ground with his jaws. He bolted away towards a small stick igloo, and I guessed that was his home.

"_Thank you, Frazwera. You've done far more than I expected," I said._

"_I'll do everything it takes to keep you comfortable and safe until the Light decides it's time to take you back," she said happily._

Weird Dream World

Emily

I halted just in front of the clearing. The clearing, where I'd first appeared in this crazy messed up dream or whatever world. I called it a dream world 'cause I could manifest objects, I couldn't die or feel pain or anything.

The consciousness-John turned to give me a look.

"I'm not sure Henryk will be able to see me," he said.

"Why not?"

"I'm just an image of your thoughts. Kind of. I think I only exist in your eyes, and that to Henryk I won't have any form, and I won't be _there_, if you catch my drift," he said sheepishly.

"Yeah. Yeah I get it. But I think we'll have to just try that out, won't we?"

He glanced at me with his icy blue eyes. They seemed more emotional than the real John's, more _alive,_ and more _human._ He blinked twice in quick succession, and I stepped out into the grassy field. The wind whipped my hair, and I thought I could sense great power, somehow, around me. John stepped out beside me, and he looked slightly nervous, glancing around him every so often in anxiety.

"Henryk!" I cried out. My yell echoed around the field, and the wind halted suddenly. All was quiet, and I felt a bead of sweat roll down my forehead. I stomped to the middle of the field.

There was a flash of light behind me and I turned to see Henryk looking at me. His greenish-blue eyes were sad, tortured§.And angry. He stood in an arrogant posture.

"Why did you run? You forced me to keep being in here, because you ran away so far I couldn't send you _back,_ so I could go too. It's

probably been about two days on the Infinity now, and they would have put me in hospital, said I was comatose. I don't know," he said in his strange accent.

"I ran because you thought it was _okay._ Me, what I would do to everyone on board the Infinity. I'd _burn them in a million degree sun!"_ I screamed angrily.

"I wasn't _going to pretend it was okay! _I was going to _work something out!_" Henryk hissed, exasperated.

The fake-John touched my arm.

"Don't fight him," he whispered, "You need to work _together._"

I looked up at him, and he touched a finger to his lips and winked slyly. He obviously knew Henryk couldn't see him, so he circled around the pilot and stuck rabbit fingers up behind his head. I giggled slightly.

"I can sense your friend, Emily, although I cannot see him," he said quietly.

The fake-John's expression changed and he slinked away. The huge Spartan looked kind of awkward stalking embarrassedly away.

"Well, what are you waiting for? Send me back to my world, and my body," I suggested.

"I can't just _do _that. We need to figure out how to stop this! Eventually one of you is going to have to go back to the Infinity- that much we've worked out so far from your previous adventures."

"The only thing we can really do is beg the Librarian, cause I sure as hell can't control that Light," I said.

"That's it- we'll ask the Librarian. I don't think she'll hear us in my world. I'll send you back to your body; and you can ask her. I think she's always watching you, always listening. She'll hear," he said excitedly, "Ready?"

"Wait! I need to say bye to my other Jo- err, friend," I said, turning towards the fake-John.

He smiled sadly.

"I guess this was bound to happen," he said ruefully, "After all, I'm only a display for your consciousness, your thoughts, your imagination. I'm not really worth much," he sighed.

"You're wrong. You are worth something. Maybe- just maybe- Henryk can bring me back here, and I'll meet you again. I promise," I said, hugging him.

"I'll be waiting," he said wistfully, "Please, I hope you keep your promises."

I laughed,

"You should know that better than most people. After all, you know my darkest secrets," I smiled.

"Ready?" Henryk asked once more, smiling.

"Beam me up Scotty!" I cried.

"Aye aye, captain!" the pilot winked.

There was a flash of light and I couldn't see.

Then I woke up.

Wolf Planet

John

The young wolf who'd chewed the deer hides appeared in Rosamina's house the next day. I pulled the pelts out of his jaws, now supple and as flexible as the day they were still attached to the animal it came from.

"_Thanks," I said to the wolf._

"_Anytime, sir," he barked, scurrying away._

_Now how was I going to make clothes? I didn't have a needle. Or thread. Plus the fact I didn't even know how to _sow.

I was going to have to learn.

Even though there was nothing or no-one to learn from?

This was going to be hard.

Oliver's House

Emily

I woke with a start, stretching my limbs to make sure I still had them. I cracked open my eyes to find Oliver, Rose, Daisy and Samuel all standing over me. They were hugging and crying, laughing. Golden light shone onto me as I lay on the couch, warming my cold arms and legs; the sun was setting.

"You're okay!" Oliver cried happily.

Daisy simply crushed her brother in a bear hug.

"Wha..What happened?" I asked groggily. My throat felt thick, like congealed blood, probably because I hadn't used it for some time.

"You were asleep for three days. Non-stop, never waking, barely breathing. Barely alive, it seemed like you were going to die," Samuel said.

I'd guessed as much.

"Where'd you go? What was going on?" Rose asked.

"Wellâ€¦Itsâ€¦I was in a world. Another world," and so I explained all about Henryk, what happened on the Infinity, and the dream world. By the end of it every single one of the faces staring at me were awed and amazed.

"So you're saying that Henryk has some sort of magic? Or power?"

"Well, yeah. I suppose you can put it that way, hey?" I replied sheepishly.

With a start I realised my face and arms were no longer burnt; they didn't feel like they were on fire.

"I'm not hurt anymore!" I exclaimed.

"It was amazing. One day ago, they simplyâ€¦Well, crusted over and healed up in half an hour. It was scary for the kids," Rose commented.

A dog barked outside, and I guessed it was Vega, the family's Staffy cross.

My stomach cried out in torture.

"We'll get you some food. We got a little water into you, but no food, not at all," Samuel said.

I raised my arms and they shook. They were weak and thin, the bones on my wrist sticking out more than ever. I slowly pulled myself up, my muscles cramped and aching. My head hurt slightly as I stood, staggering slightly. Oliver propped me up and led me over to the table, and I plopped myself down onto a chair. Rose set a plate of food in front of me; two golden brown buns smeared with yellow butter, and a glass of cool, refreshing water. I scoffed the food and sculled the water. I wouldn't eat anymore too quickly, as it could be kind of hurtful to my stomach.

Instead, I demanded to see the sunset. I pushed back my chair with weak, thin arms and went outside onto the porch of the house. The sky glowed pink and red, the dying sun dipping below the horizon, the last rays of sunlight glinting off the roofs of houses. I rested my elbows on the handrail and closed my eyes happily as the cool air wafted my hair about.

I started in surprise as I saw what I thought was a comet streaking across the sky. But it grew closer, and closer. Its huge fiery tail was very visible now, at leastâ€¦..

Five kilometres long.

No.

It couldn't be.

The Infinity grew closer, and now I could see the blunt prow of the huge spaceship, hear the roar of the engines- a deep rumbling which rattled my teeth and shook the window panes of Oliver's house. The family rushed outside, gaping at the Infinity. It was now close

enough for me to see escape pods, Broadswords and Pelicans and other little ships ejecting from random hangar doors and tunnels, and hatches. I hoped Fred, Kelly, Linda, Amanda and Henryk were on one of those escaping spacecraft.

The sound began to hurt my ears now, and the Infinity roared across the sky only about one kilometre away from the house and ploughed into the ground with a mighty crash.

I saw buildings crushed, roads crumpled and parks and trees and God knows what else destroyed by the huge hull of the Infinity. The ground shook so hard, the porch swayed underneath my feet and I was thrown to the ground.

Then the shockwave hit and Oliver's house disintegrated.

I knocked my head on a piece of flying wood and I was out cold.

Pelican 087-105-711

Henryk

"_Keep her straight!" Amanda hollered._

"_I can't!"_

The Pelican was damaged from smashing into the Infinity's side after being ejected.

"_I didn't fix this piece a junk ta let ya smash it again!"_

The Spartans in the troop bay stayed silent, Amanda sitting in front and below me in a separate cockpit. I picked a park to land in, big and grassy and I began to guide the stricken Pelican down.

"_Gently, ya foreign oaf!"_

I gritted my teeth angrily, firing the thrusters underneath to slow the Pelican's descent. There was a loud bump, I turned off the engine and opened the troop bay ramp, also opening the cockpits. I jumped out into the crisp night air, Amanda following. The Spartans began to establish a perimeter, sneaking around like cats in the gloom of the fading sun.

"_What are ya doin? We're in Emily's world; ya don't need ta to that!" Amanda hollered angrily at Blue Team. I shrugged at her._

"_That's their nature. Let them do what they were trained to do," I replied._

"_I still can't believe that bloody _Light_ sucked the _whole Infinity_ into it and dumped us into the atmosphere of Emily's Earth!" _she exclaimed._

I shook my head ruefully.

"_At least we aren't headed for a sun," I pointed out._

The Spartans of Blue Team returned.

"_There's nothing here besides trees and grass. We can hear cars, but we decided we wouldn't go that far," Linda reported._

"_Then we should stay here," I said._

"_Shouldn't we go to the Infinity or something?" Amanda said, waving her hand to the bulk of the majestic spaceship about two kilometres away, looming ominously in the dim light. Her face was hard to read._

"_Too far," Fred said._

"_We should hide, then. The authorities in Emily's world should be here soon, I dare say," I mused. _

Kelly agreed.

"_Get to the trees."_

UNSC Infinity

Commander Thomas Lasky

I heaved myself off the floor using a smoking, sparking monitor.

"_Roland!"_

The AI appeared nearby on an undamaged holographic table. His yellow avatar seemed a little upset, his WWII fighter pilot goggles glinting.

"_Status report."_

"_Major damage to the hull, but no breaches. She's still space worthy. Engines are critical but they're not melting down."_

The rest of the bridge's crew recovered slowly.

Suddenly the door was ripped open and Sarah rushed in, her coppery ponytail swinging wildly. Her armoured feet thumped loudly on the floor.

"_We're on Emily's Earth. A lot of escape pods and Pelicans and what not_s _e__jected, and they're scattered all over this city. Should we send teams to retrieve the people inside?" she asked._

"_No. We can't risk an engagement with this world's forces," I replied._

"_We've already done that by crash landing our _huge ass ship_ here!"_

I paused.

"_Point taken."_

"_I reckon a few people here would know what the Infinity is. The Halo fans of the game Emily told us about," she said._

"_I don't think that'll help us too much," I replied ruefully._

Fifteen Hours Later

Unknown Wrecked Street

Emily

Sunlight filtered in through my closed eyelids, and I coughed. Dust clogged my throat and my nostrils and I cracked open my eyes.

I sat on a pile of rubble, bright sunshine beating down on me. The huge grey hulk of the Infinity loomed in the distance, dominating the landscape completely.

I'd always thought Halo had come to me, as John. But it would only be now that I realised how wrong I was.

Now, it had really come.

87

End
file.